



# MICROCOSM

VOLUME XVII

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# Microcosm ...

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Each year the Division of Humanities of Copiah-Lincoln Community College holds a literary competition for college students and for college students and for high school students in Copiah, Lincoln, Lawrence, and Simpson Counties. Selected college entries compete in the Mississippi Community College Creative Writing Association competition and in the Southern Literary Festival competition.

The English faculty: Sharon Alexander, Edna Earle Crews, Nancy Dykes, Evelyn Sutton, and Durr Walker, Jr., Chairman of the Division of Humanities.

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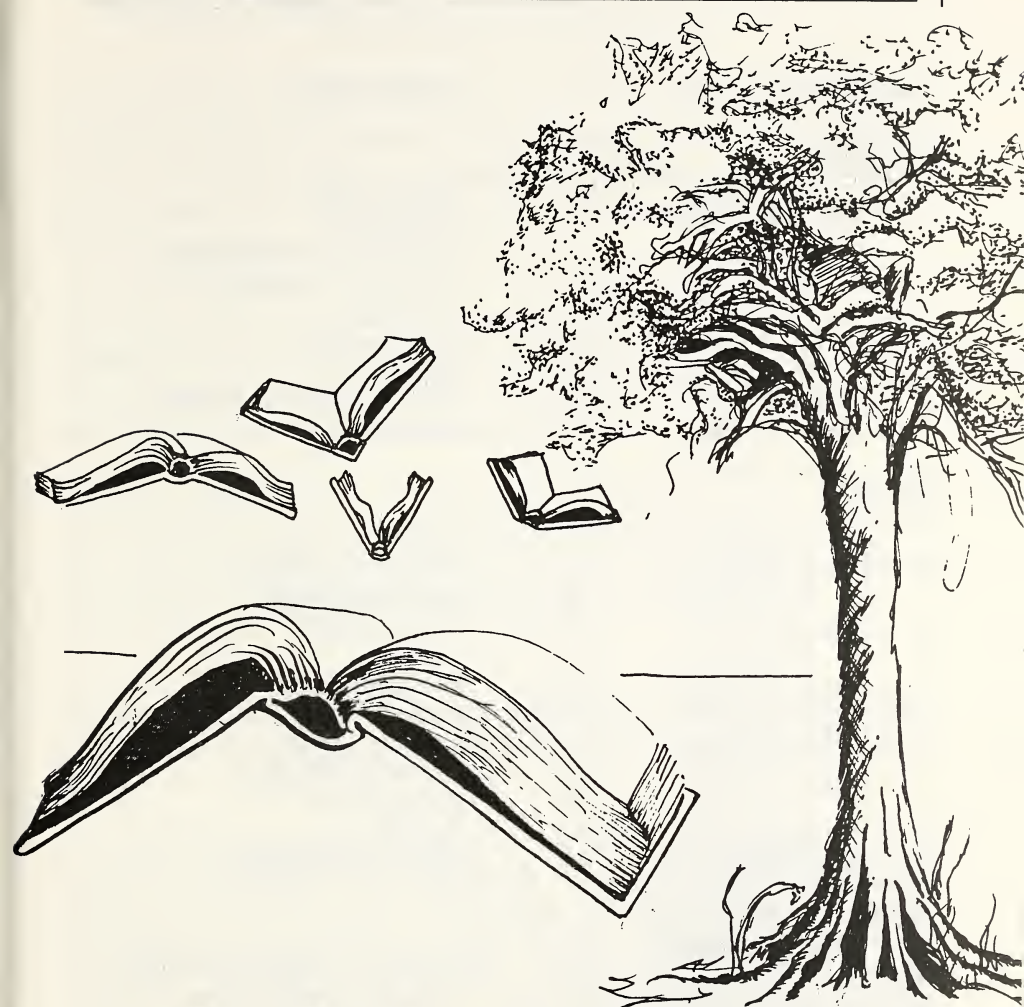
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The staff regrets that due to space limitations, "Hank" by Allen Coleman, Wesson Attendance Center; "The Woman on the Wall" by Suzanna Reynolds, Lawrence County; "The Special Summer" by Ashley Hester, Copiah Academy; "Charlie" by Richard Cole, Wesson Attendance Center; and "Just Because We're Friends" by Theresa Apel, Copiah Academy, could not be published.

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# MICROCOSM

VOLUME XVII

Copiah-Lincoln Community College  
Wesson, Mississippi



Literary Hall Of Fame

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Charles Cannon

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\*\*\* Third Place, Mississippi Community College Creative Writing Association &amp; First Place, National PTK Fiction Award

\*\* Third Place, Mississippi Community College Creative Writing Association &amp; Third Place, Southern Literary Festival

\* Honorable Mention, Mississippi Community College Creative Writing Association

~ Scholarship Award

*Dr. Charles D. Cannon*

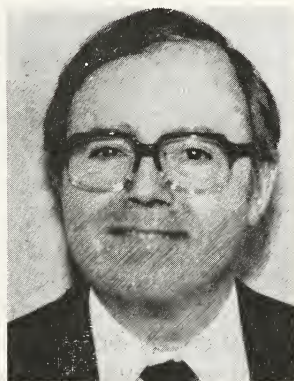
The importance of writing is that it is a vehicle for both learning and teaching: the person who has written knows more after writing than before. The consequence of research, organizing, and composing is a more detailed and coherent account of the subject than existed before the process was undertaken.

The manuscript or printed document provides both a record and the means for transmitting information or experience to contemporaries or readers even centuries later. As a result of orations, speeches, manifestoes, and declarations, societies have been transformed.

Literature - verses, songs, sagas - is an almost inevitable product of human beings, virtually all societies in the world having it in some form. For centuries it was believed that literature should both delight and instruct, and that belief has not yet vanished.

The English Club proudly inducts Dr. Charles D. Cannon as the eighth member of the Copiah-Lincoln Community College Literary Hall of Fame.

Dr. Cannon, an English professor at the University of Mississippi, has published many scholarly articles including "Noah Webster's Influence on American English" (1973), "Bevington's Shakespeare: The Latest Complete Works, A Review Essay" (1983), and "'Know Him I Shall' in The Merchant of Venice" (1988). He is also the author of a book A Warning for Fair Women: A Critical Edition which was published in 1975.



He is married to the former Patricia Faye Capwell, and they have two children, Patricia Dianne and Charles Dale.

Blanch was buried on a hill sloping softly to the east. Standing there with the sunlight full in my face I squinted to see the mourners around the grave. There was Skeet looking down at the coffin suspended above the open grave. The coffin's metallic sheen appeared to be giving off a light of its own.

No one could believe that Skeet was wearing a suit, a tie, and even shoes. Clutching a single rose in my hand, I strained to see if I recognized any of Blanch and Skeet's children, seven of them, all well-educated, successful people. But one face drew my attention in particular. As I gazed at this daughter, her head turned and she looked straight at me as if she knew I had been looking at her, and I felt a tingle in my spine for it was as if I were looking into the eyes of Blanch thirty years ago.

Memories flooded my mind as I drifted back. I could see Blanch's affectionate smile as I, a child of three, rushed to meet her at the end of the lane. Blanch, whose family was my grandparents' closest neighbor, came to visit with us often. Her visits were always a pleasure to me, and I felt her presence with me now as I drifted farther back in time remembering things I only knew from stories my grandmother had told me.

Not many people remembered that Blanch had been married for a brief time when she was fifteen to old Ned Dawson. The old man beat her severely so Blanch packed up what little bit she owned and returned to her folks' four-room house, still filled with brothers and sisters, not yet married. Divorce, a shameful thing in the Rossetta community, made her folks ashamed but they held their heads high and proclaimed to all who would listen that Ned was a dirty old man and Blanch was right to leave him. Actually Ned was only forty-three years old but he looked as if he could be ninety. At the time everyone had thought it a pity that a girl as pretty as Blanch would marry someone like old Ned but poverty was well understood in that part of Mississippi so she was not looked down upon for trying to lessen the burden on her family by leaving one less mouth to feed, even less looked down upon for getting out of a worse situation by coming home.

The day Blanch met Skeet Bodine it had been raining steadily for three days. Her daddy said if it didn't quit raining soon he was afraid the creek in the Dennis holler would be so swollen the folks on the other side would be stranded. The Pearl River was already

over its banks and still rising. They had heard from passers-by that there were bridges out all over the county and Blanch's daddy said it was the most rain he had seen since the flood of twenty-nine. Blanch's daddy invited Skeet in to sit a spell and get dry. The real reason for his hospitality was to have someone to listen to his stories. Austin Tynes — as everyone knew and Skeet Bodine was about to find out — loved to tell a tale or rather spin a yarn as Uncle Jim always said; Uncle Jim — no blood kin — was the neighbor whose land joined theirs.

Stories of ghosts and spirits were the kind he liked telling best and he was just getting to the part of the story where he saw the spirit of old Aunt Myrt, who had been dead thirty years, drifting into the yard through the garden gate wearing a long white dress. The dress had a tail so long that by the time the spirit reached the back of the house the dress was still dragging the ground at the gate leaving a trail of white stretching out ten yards or more behind her.

It was at this point that Blanch poked her head around the door and stood quietly listening. She knew it by heart and could recite it word for word, but she stood there not interrupting for she knew her place. At first she didn't see her daddy's visitor for he was small and his skin so brown that he blended right into the drabness of the room. What drew her attention to him was his legs jutting out from the chair, his bare feet crossed at the ankles, his pants legs rolled up to his knees and a crude snake skin belt at his hips.

As she looked to see who those calloused feet belonged to, she saw to her amazement the blackest eyes she had ever seen staring back at her. Not able to take her eyes away from his, she became aware of the odor of fish. Realizing that this stranger was here to sell fish, she once again could hear her daddy as he wound up his ghost tale with his rendering of why the spirit of old Aunt Myrt haunted the garden that night.

The spirit, of course, was waiting for her sister Hattie, who on her death bed passed into eternity at the stroke of midnight. Austin could never decide if the baying of the hounds echoing across the fog-shrouded hills at the very moment of her death alerted the angels of heaven to prepare a place for her there or signaled the devil's demon's in hell to get ready for her arrival.

Noticing Blanch standing in the doorway her daddy quickly ended the story by inviting Skeet to come on into the kitchen for a bite of dinner. While the men were drawing water from the well



for washing their hands, Blanch stepped back into the kitchen to set another plate and tell her mama to expect a guest at the dinner table.

And so her life began with Skeet Bodine. Within a month of the first visit Blanch and Skeet had run away and married. Blanch knew that in spite of her first marriage this one would last. She was eighteen years old by now and thought she was mature enough to know love. Never considering life without him, Blanch was happy even though Skeet never did a day's hard work and probably would not have if his life depended on it. From time to time he made a little money by setting nets and selling the fish he caught. Most of the time, having nowhere to go, they drifted back and forth between her family and his. Her French speaking brown-skinned in-laws were a source of fascination for Blanch. They were almost as dark as the Negroes who picked cotton on her daddy's small farm every fall. Blanch's light skin and blue eyes contrasted sharply with those of the Bodine's. They were originally from the Atchafalaya Basin in lower Louisiana but now lived in Courtney County making their living fishing the Pearl River, selling catfish to the market or house-to-house when the market wasn't buying all they had caught.

Within a year of marriage Blanch gave birth to a baby girl with eyes black as coal. They named her Rose. When the little girl was about a year old, Blanch had a disturbing dream. She thought she woke up in the middle of the night and saw a blinding light shining in the corner of the room where there was no window. She tried to wake Skeet to show him the bright light but he would not rouse. Gradually the light faded and Blanch fell deeper into a troubled sleep.

When morning came the cry of the child let her know that something was wrong. Rushing to the cradle Blanch found the baby on fire with a fever, struggling for breath. Hearing Blanch hollering for help Skeet jumped out of bed and having no other way to travel he ran in his bare feet the two miles to Uncle Jim's for help. Yet, the little girl died on the way to the county hospital.

It was the death of the child that made such a lasting impression on me. The body was brought to Blanch's folk's house for the viewing. The night before the funeral my cousin and I decided that we were going to sit up all night with the body like the grown-ups. I was five then and my cousin Mary was about the same age.

Seeing Rose lying there in the tiny coffin had a devastating



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effect on us. She looked like a baby doll in her white dress embroidered with pink rosebuds and trimmed in white eyelet lace. We sat close to the coffin in the glow of the lamp light smelling the odor of carnations, pink, sweet and delicate. Looking around to see if anyone was watching I reached out to touch the baby. I was shocked at the feel of the cold, hard flesh. It was then that I realized what death was.

We whispered softly of the things we had learned in Sunday school about death, weeping until we were almost sick. After a while my grandmother decided we had cried enough and made us take the lamp and go sit on the back porch with the women. I remember my grandmother saying to me, "Susie, don't cry so, you'll see Rose again someday in heaven. Just think Susie, Rose is in heaven now playing with the angels." This bit of philosophical information must have satisfied my emotions because in spite of my determination to sit up all night, I soon drifted off to sleep, my head nestled in my grandmother's lap, while gazing up at the stars wondering how far away heaven was.

Years later I could think of Blanch's Rose who died and still taste the tears I had cried.

I kept track of Blanch through the years even though I had moved several hundred miles away. Blanch had a delightful energy for life that everyone admired. Skeet had a passion for staying home all day sunning himself on the porch while Blanch worked. While Skeet rolled his Prince Albert, Blanch took in other people's washing and ironing for money to buy food for the children. While Skeet slept in the sun, Blanch worried about her children's future.

Blanch and Skeet never owned a car. Whenever it was necessary to go to Riverview they had to catch a ride from a neighbor. Most Saturdays Skeet sat on a bench in front of the county courthouse with no shoes on and his pants rolled up to his knees. After he finished his shopping he would sit there swapping stories with local folks until someone came by headed in his direction. Then he would hitch a ride back home. The local people became so accustomed to seeing Skeet in town, barefooted as the day he was born that they soon didn't notice. No one ever said that Skeet was lazy. It was just accepted but I always thought Blanch saw something in him beyond what everyone else saw. Maybe Skeet had a dream and it took all his time planning for it. I guess I'll never know.

The taste of tears brought me back from the past as I became

aware that the funeral service was over. Realizing I was still holding the rose in my hand, I wondered if the death of Rose was the tragic loss I had thought it was or if it had served to prepare Blanch for her life with Skeet. Watching the mourners as they moved away from the grave toward the church, I walked down the hill and paused a moment to place the rose carefully on top of Blanch's coffin.

The subtle odor of carnations stirred something within me and turning away I caught a glimpse of Skeet in his suit and tie — and shoes.

The city was like two women. In the summer, she could be loving, tender, and beautiful. In winter, she was almost always cold and ruthless—caring little for those who slept in her arms. Unfortunately, it was the dead of winter.

Claude Anderson stepped out into the icy night air and was greeted immediately with her winter persona. A deep chill swept through his frame. Thin mist slowly encircled the receding patch of dark brown hair on his head. The weather wasn't making his unpleasant task any easier.

Tramping along through the grungy streets, he made his way to Le Bistop, his favorite dive. If ever there was a time when he needed a beer, it was now. After a few pulls off the Stroh's, he felt his neck muscles begin to relax a bit. By the time he had polished off his second beer, he was feeling almost himself again. The dim aura of the place and the easy-listening music did much to calm his frazzled state.

"No better time than the present," he thought to himself. He chuckled aloud at the almost comical thought; comical only to a man with as much on his mind as Claude had. He strode over to the phone booth in one dimly lit corner of the room, dropped in a dime, and dialed a number.

He waited. One ring. . .two rings. . .three rings. . . "Hello." He slammed the receiver back into his cradle with unintended force. The words which he had practiced over and over, and which only an hour before had rolled off his tongue with amazing ease now caught in his throat like a bone. He couldn't do it. Not yet. Claude needed another beer.

He sat at his table feeling even more alone than he actually was. The next two beers didn't have the effect he hoped they would.

She appeared from nowhere; an amazing blonde-haired beauty in a revealing red dress.

"Hi! Mind if I sit down?"

"Not tonight," his mind wailed. The last thing he needed tonight was some barmaid trying to pry into his head.

"Sure!" he said regretfully. The slender woman seemed to float into her seat.

"Looks like you've got troubles. Wanna talk about them?"

Just as he'd figured. Probably, the bar's owner had spotted



him, recognized the potential for a hefty tab, and had sent Dr. Freud here, to help him drink his troubles away.

"What's it to you?," he said with uncharacteristic rudeness.

"Just a curious girl with nothin' better to do. I'm Frannie. At least, my friends always called me Frannie. My given name is actually Francelle."

"Nice to meet you, Francelle. . . uh, Frannie. I'm Claude," he said, still not fully appreciative of the company, but at least glad she was nicer to look at than what was going on in his head.

"Well, Claude, why don't you buy a lady a glass of gingerale?"

What's this? Trying to run me up a tab, and all she wants is gingerale? Claude attributed it to the fact that it was just hard to find good help these days. Still, at this point he was willing to buy her just about anything if she would only go away. As lovely as she was, tonight was simply not a night for friendly conversation.

"Bartender! Another beer, and tack on a gingerale for the lady."

The bartender was over with the drinks in just a few seconds. They sat for a while, just looking around the semi-crowded little bar. Finally, Frannie spoke.

"So, about this little problem you're having. Why don't you tell me all about it?"

"Well, Frannie, if you really want to play psychiatrist, I'm game. I left for work this morning with no problems. Well, almost no problems. I mean, there was the morning rush-hour traffic and all, but basically, everything was peachy. I'm a C.P.A. Do you know anything about the accounting world? There's a big misconception about accountants. People seem to think of them as being boring little men in bow-ties and wing-tips who know little else than their job. Well, that's bunk!"

The beer made him talkative. It always did. But tonight, he seemed a bit more so than usual.

"I've been accounting for the same cussed firm for thirteen years. Can you imagine? Thirteen years in the same place? Can you imagine?"

It was obvious that Frannie couldn't. Still, she watched and she listened with more evident interest than he would have expected.

"Today, I walked into work just like I've done every day for the last thirteen years. But something happened. Not really happened. Just inside my head, you know? I sat down at my desk,

looked at tax forms, accounts receivables, journals, all that stuff, and it looked so foreign. It was like I'd never been there before. And I never want to be there again either. My mind screamed at me to get away from it. To just walk out and leave it all. I didn't want to do it anymore. So, I quit my job. That's so unlike me. I'm not spontaneous."

"Now now, Claude. Mustn't get so upset," Frannie said in the softest, most soothing voice he'd ever heard. "Everything's going to be fine. We're here to help you."

We? Did she say We? Claude was beginning to wonder about her sanity almost as much as he was currently wondering about his own.

"Who's here to help me?," he asked reluctantly.

"Why, we are, Claude," Frannie said with a sheepish grin on her face. Claude looked around then, and the terror that swept through him could scarcely be described. The bar looked almost the same. Almost. It was the people who were different. They were all staring at him. Even the bartender stared.

"HIS EYES ARE GLOWING," Claude screamed. He looked back to Frannie, as if asking for help. Her eyes glowed too.

He sprang from his chair in a flash and was making his way toward the front door when Frannie appeared before him like the mist.

"This can't be happening," his mind screamed at him. But it was happening, and somehow he knew it. As he stared up into Frannie's glowing red eyes, he backed away until, ultimately, he met the back wall of the bar. Frannie and her comrades were closing in on him. There was nothing left to do but face them.

"What are you?" he screamed at the Frannie-thing. With a smile that was too much like something out of a horror movie, she advanced until there were bare inches between them. Claude fell to his knees, trying, desperately trying to become part of the wall—to seep down into one of the cracks in the plaster and escape this nightmare.

Then Frannie grabbed him. Her strength was unbelievable. Without even a grunt, she picked him up to his feet, then six inches beyond. He struggled against her for all he was worth, but it was, of course, no use. Her strength was supernatural. And so was she.

"Claude," Frannie's voice, now quite different, droned. What<sup>+</sup> had once, only two minutes before, been the most comforting

voice he'd ever heard was now not human. It was deep and raspy and seemed to come not from her throat but from the very depths of her soul.

"Claude, stop fighting us. You're a part of us now. We've been watching you for some time. We want you."

"Well, you can't have me, Frannie. Let me go I want to go home just let me go home please Frannie let me go home."

"Claude, if you'll just ease up a moment, I'll explain it all to you."

"Just let me go home, Frannie, just let me. . ."

"CLAUDE, SHUT UP!"

Claude shut up.

"Now, let's see if we can't discuss this rationally, shall we? Claude, we're only here because you called us."

"I didn't call anybody, Frannie," Claude screamed frantically.

"Oh, but you did, Claude. You called us this morning when you became dissatisfied with your job. You've been calling us for months now, ever since you've become dissatisfied with your life. We are your salvation, Claude.

Remember just a little while ago when you tried to call your wife to tell her what you did today? You hung up. You thought it was because you couldn't face her, Claude. That wasn't the reason. You hung up because you knew that your wife couldn't help you. You knew that she couldn't relieve the burden of your misery. We can, Claude."

Again, the room took on an air of change. Frannie's face, in fact, the face of the whole group, began to change again. Claude looked into the gazing crimson eyes of the multitude, and his mouth stood agape at what he saw there. He looked upon the last five months of his life. There, in the eyes, in the very face of these creatures, was the entire story of his demise. He witnessed the coldness experienced between him and his wife. He witnessed the tension between him and his boss. He saw, with ultimate sadness, the face of his only child, Matthew when he called all those nights to say he was working late. He saw the emotional wreck he had become, and for a moment, he wished it would stop—that the faces of these creatures would come back. As terrible as they were, they were nothing compared to the sheer chaos of his own life.

"Don't you see, Claude?"

It was the Frannie-thing again.

"You have made us. You've given us life through your life's



death. We are what you've become, Claude."

"No! I'll change it. I know I can. I can change it. Please just give me another chance. Frannie, God, I'll do anything. Just give me another chance."

"No, Claude, you've run out of chances. You're a part of us now. And we're a part of you."

At that very moment, the wall behind the mass of Frannie-things seemed to open up. A seething smog drifted out of the new opening. A light as bright as a thousand suns shone through the opening.

"Come, Claude," Frannie beckoned him.

"Frannie, Please. . . ."

"Come."

"No, Frannie, tell me I can have another chance."

The multitude descended upon the shrieking little man. He was carried weightless to the opening.

"Frannie, let me go. Let me goooooo. . . ."

The group descended upon Claude, grabbed him, and pulled him with them into the doorway. The wall closed behind them. It was as if they'd never been there. Le Bistrop stood deserted.

The missing persons report filed by Claude's wife was added to the growing number of such reports in the city. Eventually, she and little Matthew gave up hope. No one ever discovered the truth about Claude's disappearance. Oh, rumors circulated. Some said he'd run off with some woman. Some said he was kidnapped. There was even one poor soul who was just sure he'd run off to join the F.B.I. No one has ever speculated the real truth. Claude Anderson is a prisoner of his own desolation, and there is no escape.

He was beyond even thoughts of poverty now; he was rich, like he'd always dreamed of being. He married a formerly beautiful girl, but now fat. They produced two male mechanisms, who would both underlive their father, Charles Powers. The older son was Bobby, the younger Jeff. Their mother, Caroline Powers, died while exerting the youngest one; probably because she was overweight and underhealthy, unlike her childhood memories. It doesn't matter whether she lived or not; she only married Charles for his money, as is the custom in the modern mechanical world. Charles and Caroline had attended high school together; she was skinny and beautiful, he was an overlooked nerd. She ignored him; he didn't notice nor care.

Charles Powers had no amazing, outstanding characteristics—at least none noticeable to the naked eye. (Charles liked being naked; he felt free.) Charles was no model nor a politician. The only characteristic he possessed was his imagination<sup>1</sup>, which brought him to where he is today.

Today Charles is a rich teacher, his two life-long visions: being rich and teaching. But, of course, he did not get rich from teaching, as is the custom in the modern mechanical world. He inherited his wealth from his grandmother whom he never knew. Or at least he didn't see her enough to reason a relationship. Charles was an only son of an only son, who was the son of Charles' money pit, his grandmother, who survived the late Montey Powers. Montey Powers was a well-to-do banker who inherited his well-to-do job from his father, Charles's great-grandfather, the late Rhode Powers, who began First Liberty Loans. It was formerly known as First Liberty Savings and Loans; but nowadays the custom is to borrow, not save, so the name was changed. Before Charles's greeted his hand-me-down tidings, he was quite broke. Charles was a pitiable man in pitiful shape; no money, no job, no car, only a one-room boarding house, a familiar abode for many people in the mechanical world. He would've worked at his late father's bank and sat at a boring job all day that he didn't like, only he had too much pride. Pride. Instead, he sat at a local bar all day that he didn't like. But he would rather sit and sip at a bar all day than take a hand-me-down job and hate it. Yes, Charles had pride, and luckily he had his old buddy, imagination.

Charles dreamed constantly. Charles dreamed of teaching

and being rich. That's it. But he had no formal education, except high school, where he only made C's, and didn't care. He would've cared if he would have known what he knows now. But he did not know much then, so he didn't care. Evidently Charles had a snowball's chance of becoming a teacher or being rich. But Charles continued dreaming. He didn't stop; even after he found out about his inheritance. By then Charles was so poor he couldn't even afford pride, so he accepted his pot of gold. Besides, without money, he saw no future, another custom of the modern mechanical world.

After he accepted the money, the first thing he did was imagine; Charles imagined what he could do with all that money (it was a large sum too). He thought of many uses: a big home, a big car, a big wallet. He contemplated giving to the needy, but as far as Charles was concerned, he was the needy. Besides, he knew the fate of the world; his money wouldn't help. He knew the rich would stay rich and versa-vice. And you know the rest; he married and had two offspring. By far, Charles outlived his sons. As custom has it, today's generation has a small chance of making it past twenty. Without imagination, they die off one by one. Usually by false imaginations: flying high on weed; sexual fantasies; and so on.

Don't think Charles didn't try to help his sons; he did. He tried to instill into them his only positive characteristic (imagination); but this was an intangible task. He didn't know the right way to raise children in the modern world; besides, he was no inventor. However, in the third grade, he did realize what his eraser was for. It was for erasing mistakes—a difficult task, by far. But only he remembers the eraser incident; no one else thought it a big deal. They only laughed because they already knew what it was for. They also laughed because it is customary to do what everyone else is doing. Charles was not a hippie; he wasn't violent, and he never smoked marijuana. But once when he was younger, he walked into the bathroom at his high school, Kennedy High, and saw two boys smoking a roll of paper. Like a furnace. He didn't know whether it was a joint or simply a plain old cigarette, but the smell almost killed him. He guessed it was a joint, but still he wasn't sure. He didn't say anything to anyone. He only felt nauseated and left. Charles' only unconventional aspect harbored in his imagination. One time in the eight grade, he imagined he was making love with his teacher, who wasn't ugly; then he felt something and didn't know what it was, so he quit dreaming. When he



got home, he relinquished the dream, and figured out what was disturbing him.

From that point on, Charles never pried past the point of rude discovery in his life, nor anyone else's life; not even his formerly skinny, turned fat, but now dead, still fat wife. So maybe he was a radical after all.

Before he and his wife made babies, he applied for a job at the local high school, Lincoln High. He made a home-made application. The home-made application said he would work for nothing; it said he would simply talk with his class about whatever they wished, in order that they could express themselves concerning any situation that came up. Charles didn't get the job; Charles didn't even get an interview. Not even for free. Later he did get a job as a teacher. He opened a day care center for children whose mothers had to work, as is the custom in the modern mechanical world. Free of charge. He played with the innocent, blameless stones all day, from seven to five. Sometimes Caroline would check in on him and the children, but not commonly—especially after she died while exerting Bobby, the youngest, soon-to-be-dead son.

Later in life, Charles found his imagination especially important. He used it for other things besides teaching and getting rich. Charles imagined things such as death, happiness, angels, and heaven. Things of that nature. One day, after all the children had been picked up by their working mothers, Charles sat down comfortably on his stool. He began dreaming. He dreamed he fell off his stool and landed on a tugboat. Planted on his back, his arms crossed happily, his legs spread-eagled, he and the tugboat floated carelessly down the Mississippi River. Suddenly a gusty breeze snatched him away from the boat. He felt happy. He soared beyond all dimensions. What remained on earth was only the tugboat, now only a minute speck.

As Charles wandered upward and upward, he found angels, millions of them, and fit in well. Charles finally found Heaven, without a hell.

Charles was no longer dreaming.

*Micki Freels*

I was twelve years old when the killings started again. Lawson Grove, Mississippi, had a population then of about 2,500 and that's not counting the folks who lived out in the country. When something happened, everyone in town knew about it by sundown. If it happened to one of our own it happened to all of us.

I remember the day Charlie Danks came in from his hunt in the woods with the body of eleven-year-old Susan Ray Nelson. She'd been missing for three days and the authorities didn't have the first clue as to her whereabouts.

My daddy was the town's only doctor and county coroner. The men, intent on their work, didn't pay much mind to me and Donna Jean watching from across the hall when they brought Susan Ray's body in. We'd been with Daddy when he got the call so he didn't have much choice but to bring us along. Of course if we'd been doing what we'd been told to do, we'd have been in the waiting room studying. But curiosity got the best of us. We were more interested in what Daddy and Deputy Wilson were doing than in our school work.

"Can you tell how she died, Doc?"

"Strictly from a preliminary standpoint, she was smothered."

"And?"

"And it's obvious she was raped."

"Before or after she was smothered?"

"I can't tell until I've done an autopsy."

"How can this be happening again in Lawson Grove?"

"Whoa, let's not jump the gun here. I see no evidence so far to link little Susan's death here to any of those killings back in '52. And I'd advise you not to go 'round spoutin' off any ideas you've got like that without proof. You know how a tale gets caught in a whirlwind 'round here."

"Yeah. I guess you're right, Doc."

"Darn tootin' I'm right. Besides that, this little girl's death is going to be hard enough on this town without bringing up all those grizzly memories. That was twelve years ago, Pete. You weren't old enough to remember all that went on."

"I remember enough."

"Well I don't want to remember any of it!"

About that time Daddy looked up and saw us peeping around the corner. Donna Jean took off like a bolt of lightning. I don't know if I was unable to move because of the look in daddy's eyes or the look in Susan Ray's eyes. The fear I felt being caught by Daddy seemed nothing like the fear in whatever Susan Ray was looking at.

Daddy came and knelt in front of me. I still couldn't move. Susan Ray's eyes seemed to have a hold on me. When Daddy put his arms around me I was as stiff as old Jenkins, our scarecrow. Daddy said wouldn't no one think of naming a scarecrow but me. I'd tell him, "Now Daddy, I don't hear nobody calling me and you person. I'm called Jamie Sue and you're called Daddy and Doc and Doctor McKinnis. Why just look how many names you've got. So they ought not be called bird, cricket, dog or even scarecrow. Besides, it gives me something to do; kinda makes me feel like Adam in the garden. He called them what they are and I give them a name. Now, don't that make sense to you, Daddy?" Daddy just roared. Couldn't no one make him laugh like I could. Not since Mamma died.

But Daddy wasn't laughing now. "Cover Susan Ray up, will you, Pete? And close the door behind you when you come out, too."

"Sure thing, Doc."

"Now, young lady, I think you've seen enough for one day. Daddy's gonna have to watch you a little closer from now on. This ain't no place for me to be bringing you to, anyway."

I could hear them talking but I couldn't do much more than just let the two of them lead me down the hallway and out to the car.

"You reckon she's going to be all right, Doc?"

"Sure, we're going to be just fine, aren't we, honey?"

I don't remember much more about that day. Daddy took me home, gave me a shot of something, then put me to bed. Listening to him as he whistled a little tune to me, I finally fell asleep and didn't see Susan Ray's eyes anymore, that day.

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Things didn't get much better in Lawson Grove after that. The last days of spring were buried with Susan Ray. She lay in the same cemetery Mamma did. Daddy wouldn't ever tell me why Mamma took her life. He'd just say it was a sickness and left it at that.



In spite of a late frost, that summer started off hot and muggy. Two more girls' bodies were found, raped and smothered, within a month after Susan Ray was buried. The brutality of their deaths had such an effect on the townspeople, both emotionally and in the way we lived our lives. Donna Jean's folks didn't even let her come over anymore unless they were visiting, too.

One evening Daddy brought a kind, old colored woman home with him.

"Jamie Sue, this is Annie Mae Jackson. She'll be tendin' house for us from now on."

Meant more to tend me I thought. "How do you do, Miss Jackson?"

"Well, now, I do right fine, Miss Jamie Sue. You know, some folks I've worked for has called me Miss Annie Mae then some's called me plain Miss Annie. I ain't never been called Miss Jackson before. I'm right honored, Missy, but it just ain't the grown folks way, if you know what I mean?"

"Gosh, grown folks sure got some confusin' ways!"

"That they do, Missy, but when you is colored folk like me and little folk like you, we do it the grown folks way."

Miss Annie wasn't Mamma but her cooking sure beat Daddy's. Sometimes I'd forget the real reason she'd come to stay with us. Our favorite time of the day was evening. We'd sit on the front porch watching the birds fly into the yellow silhouette of the setting sun waiting for Daddy to come home.

"I bet you the cost of a sno-cone, Rayford Taylor gets here 'fore Daddy does today."

"Now what makes you think that, Miss Jamie Sue?"

"Well, if I close my eyes and listen, I can hear the pretty music from his ice cream truck. It's got such a fanciful, melody I can almost feel myself in the breeze, riding the carousel, just like they got at the fair. Problem is I get so lost in its magic, sometimes I wish the carousel music would just take me away with it."

"Well, now that's mighty fine thinkin' for a twelve-year-old. But I just bet if you'd listen a little closer, you'd lose that dime."

I closed my eyes and did as she told me. At first I didn't hear it because I was only listening to the carousel music, but there it was. Clink, clink, clink. Clink, clink, clink. So many times I had heard that sound over the years -- pulling on Daddy's key caddy, trying to get his attention. Sure enough, there he was,

rounding the corner, coming up the walk, and Rayford Taylor's ice-cream truck was still a block away.

As happy as I was to see Daddy, there was something about the look on his face that kept me still where I sat. He somehow looked different from the man who'd kissed me good-bye at breakfast. He just passed me by and walked on into the house, like he wasn't even wanting to see me.

I ran in after him to the parlor with Miss Annie right on my heels trying to slow me down.

"I don't think it's a good time to be bothering your daddy, now."

"It's all right, Miss Annie. She'll be finding out soon. She should hear it from me."

"What is it, Daddy?"

"They brought in another girl's body late this morning, Angel. Tommy Lee Parker found her on the bank of Wicks Creek while he was fishing."

"Oh, Daddy, how awful! Why would somebody do something so terrible?"

"Baby, please, just sit down a minute and listen to me. The girl he found was Donna Jean."

Everything moved right out from under me. I could hear Daddy and Miss Annie talking to me but I couldn't understand anything they were saying. Warm shadows crept over me as I felt myself going away from the rest of the world, a world where I no longer had a best friend.

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Though I was more to my senses by morning, the dark, shadowy feeling was still there. I had no desire to eat, talk or do anything functional. I was purely content to sit in the front porch swing, swaying back and forth within the shadows. Daddy was worried something fierce, and Miss Annie was doing all she could to help.

"Don't you fret none, Dr. McKinnis. Miss Jamie Sue — she gonna be just fine. Things like this take a little longer with children. She's just needin' some time is all."

"Oh, if you only knew the half of it."

"A woman don't know what she ain't told."

"I can't bring myself to accept it much less tell someone else."

"Sometimes you got to uncover your wounds and let them air some before they'll heal"

"Guess you're right. We'll talk more about it when the time's right; not around Jamie Sue. I don't know how much more the child can take. I thought when her mamma died she have a breakdown for sure. But with a little time and a lot of lovin' she recovered just fine."

"And that's all it's gonna take this time. She'll be just fine, sir. She's a strong one, she is. And Miss Annie's gonna take good care of her. Just be careful, Dr. McKinnis. Some things left covered too long never heal."

So another girl was laid to rest in Mamma's cemetery. Everyone tried to return to a normal way of life, but to me Lawson Grove would never be the same without Mamma and Donna Jean.

One evening, about a week later, Miss Annie and I were sitting on the front porch swing as usual. She was doing her needlework and I was listening to the faint sound of music in the air. As the sound got closer, I heard the familiar melody of the carousel, and I felt the urge to sway like the sycamore in a lazy breeze. About that time, another sound distorted the magic of my fantasy, and Miss Annie left to answer the phone. Probably Daddy calling to check on me again.

After she went in, I saw Rayford Taylor's ice-cream truck round the corner. Maybe I was thirsty from the heat or maybe I just wanted to do something to take my mind off things for a while. At any rate, I decided I wanted a sno-cone. He saw me coming down the walk and pulled up along the curb.

"Well now, how are you doing, Miss Jamie Sue? What'll it be for you today."

"I'd like a cherry sno-cone if you please, Mr. Taylor."

I glanced back towards the house while he was fixing my sno-cone. If Miss Annie knew I'd left the porch without her, all her patience would be gone. She must have still been on the phone though, 'cause I didn't see any sign of her. I turned back and watched as Mr. Taylor put the cool chunks of slivered ice in the cup, then squirted the dark, red syrup over the ice, and last, some dark brown liquid out of a bottle that I figured to be flavoring. This was going to be good.

"Here you are, Miss Jamie Sue, with extra syrup, just like you like it."

I took a big sip from the sno-cone then paid him his dime.

"Thanks, Mr. Taylor. Maybe this'll cool me off."

"I sure was sorry to hear about Donna Jean. The whole



town knows how close the two of you were. Why, it ain't safe to walk the streets. Any young lady on the streets these days, why she's just simply asking for trouble. Hey, are you feelin' all right, Miss Jamie Sue?"

I had the funniest feeling come over me and it wasn't dark shadows, either. The whole world exploded in light. There was a real bright light, then all kinds of colors started coming at me from different directions. At first I was scared to death and tried to scream for Mr. Taylor or Miss Annie to help me. Then, all of a sudden, I felt the softest breeze and felt myself being carried away. And the music . . . that pretty carousel music. I was enchanted, lost in a fantasy with no desire to leave.

Like all fantasies, mine came to an abrupt end. The music stopped and the breeze left as swiftly as it had appeared. The colors were gone, too, but I still couldn't see ... I felt myself being dumped on hard cold, dry ground. The blackness was going away, but the dark shadows lingered. Suddenly, I felt a tremendous weight on me and a pain ripped through me like a bolt of fire. The pain kept tearing into me until I felt myself get sick. Whether it was from fear or the fierce pain I don't know, but the shadowy fog began to clear and as it did, I was looking right into Rayford Taylor's eyes. Evil, hungry eyes straight from Hell and in them I saw the reflection of my own eyes. They had the same look of fear I had seen in Susan Ray's eyes that day in Daddy's office. I knew then what Susan Ray had seen just before she died.

Overtaken by shock and fear, I reached into the bottom of my gut and the deepest part of my soul and let out a scream that caused every tree for miles around to shake with terror. Rayford Taylor quickly covered my face with the pillow he'd meant to smother me with. It felt like I fought the darkness and pain for an eternity. Suddenly, I heard a loud explosion and thought surely my brain had burst. The weight of Rayford Taylor's body crumpled full force on top of me. I remember Deputy Wilson pulling me up and Miss Annie standing there crying. But what struck me most was seeing my daddy with a look of hate in his eyes and a gun in his hands. If Deputy Wilson hadn't stopped him, I think he'd have unloaded the gun into Rayford Taylor's body. Wasn't any need though. The devil himself was dead... to the rest of the world anyway. Once again, I allowed myself to slip into oblivion.

I woke up in a hospital in the big city. I'd heard about this kind of hospital. They say it's where you go when you're not

right in the head anymore. I didn't know why I was there. My head felt fine. It was the nightmares that wouldn't leave me alone. It was a while before Daddy agreed I was well enough to be told everything. Rayford Taylor, using sno-cones dusted with animal tranquilizer, clouded children's minds to work his evil. Even though the effects had virtually worn off by the next day, the physical and emotional anguish I'd been though did not go away as easily. Daddy said Rayford Taylor had been both diabolically evil and deviously smart. His mistake was in thinking I was home alone. Neither of us were aware that Miss Annle had come back to the front porch and had seen him putting me, drugged and oblivious, into his truck. She wasted no time in getting Daddy and Deputy Wilson. Because of approaching dusk, they were about to abandon their search along Wicks Creek where some of the other bodies had been found, when they heard me scream. The rest I knew; or thought I knew.

Daddy tried hard to explain everything to me but Rayford Taylor and what he had done were from a world I didn't understand.

"Daddy, what did I do wrong? Why, did he hurt me like that?"

"You didn't do anything wrong, baby, nothing at all. Don't you think that for one minute."

"But he hurt me, Daddy! Why would he hurt me like that for nothin'?"

"Rayford Taylor was a very sick man. There's some things Daddy never told you that I guess I should have. I just didn't want to see you hurt.

"You know you can tell me anything, Daddy. I love you."

"Oh, baby, Daddy loves you, too. But this has got to do with your mamma."

"I sure do miss Mamma. Why'd she have to go and leave us like that?"

"This wasn't the first time Rayford Taylor has raped and killed here. We just didn't know it was him. Back in '52 we found seven young girls in six months time, all had been raped and smothered. I was coming back from fishing one evening and found your mamma in the woods close to Wicks Creek. He'd left her for dead."

"You mean he hurt Mamma like he did me?"

"Being a doctor I knew just what to do. I tended and doctored her until she was well, physically. I couldn't help her

mentally though. She was so full of that poison he used on everybody she didn't see his face. But he remained a constant nightmare to her somehow, and I just couldn't doctor that."

"Is that when you fell in love with her?"

"I fell in love with her the moment I saw her, even when I thought she was dead. She was so beautiful. We soon found out she was pregnant with you, so we got married."

"You mean, that awful man is ——"

"That's why I didn't tell you before now. We didn't know who had raped your mamma. Even if I had known I wouldn't have told you. You are my little girl and I didn't want anything in the world to hurt you or take you away from me. Your mamma was already gone; I couldn't lose you, too!

"Nothing in this world could take me away from you. You're my daddy. We'll always be together. I love you so much."

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All this happened many years ago. The population of Lawson Grove has grown to near about 5,000. Most have never heard of Rayford Taylor. Daddy and Miss Annie both have since passed on. As for me... I took the caretaker's job at Mamma's cemetery. I spend my days tending the graves of the only people I love. I've been perfectly content until yesterday when they found another girl's body, raped and smothered, in the woods by Wicks Creek.



**Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary...**

**In the howling wind, comes the stinging rain...**

An old man sat alone in his big, comfortable home, the fire in the fireplace — warm, red. Outside it rained. Alex turned the page of his book and sighed. He was tired. But storms had always upset him; since he was a child, he remembered. And now he was old rain aggravated his arthritis. The medication he'd taken hadn't helped any. It also didn't help that he had moved to Sunderland, right on the North Sea shore and near the Lake District; the rainiest part of England. But at least it was away from the city.

**...suddenly there came a tapping,  
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door...**

Alex got up to answer the door, his mind filled with why's and wherefore's about people being out at this time of night. His service revolver wasn't far away.

The door swung wide and there stood a small child, shivering in the stinging rain.

**Only this and nothing more...**

"What in heaven's name?" Alex asked, bewildered. The child was ghastly white with deep, dark eyes; streaked with tears, her face full of fear. "M-m-m-mom—th-the car—we-we—"

The poor child can hardly speak she's so scared, Alex thought. And not very properly dressed for this weather.

The girl wore only blue jeans and tennis shoes and a light jacket over a black shirt. Her golden hair and her clothes were soaked.

Alex knelt down on one knee and took the girl by the

shoulders in his big old hands. "Calm down, child. Tell me what happened."

**Ah, distinctly I remember it was bleak December...**

The girl stood shivering in the door way and Alex remembered his old English manners.

"Come in, child," he said.

"There isn't time. Mom might be hurt," said the girl excitedly.

"Let me get my coat."

Alex hurried to the closet and got his grey overcoat to cover his grey body. He hadn't bothered getting undressed when he had come in from his trip to town earlier.

Alex hurried back to the little girl, still in the door way: waiting, shivering.

"Come on child. You'll have to show me where she is."

They piled into Alex's old car and went to find the girl's mother.

**But I still haven't found what I'm looking for...**

They found the girl's mother.

The car had obviously slid on the wet road and had flipped on its side, glass on the road mixed with the driving rain, which now was driving nails into the ground and the wind shook the wrecked car.

**In the locust wind, comes a rattle and hum...**

Alex went to the car's front end (new model, he noticed) and got down on his hands and knees. He peered into the wind-screen.

**I am he who is blind...**

The girl's mother was unconscious, bleeding from her nose and mouth. There were bruises on her face.

Alex couldn't reach the door lever nor could he turn the car over. He sat down in the mud and kicked the windscreen with

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his shoe heel until the glass finally shattered.  
He kept kicking until the way was clear to get the woman out of  
the car.

Alex crawled through the glass and grasped the woman  
under her arms. If she had been lying any differently he'd never  
have gotten her out.

Alex pulled her out little by little until she was completely  
on the road and sat down to rest.

**Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer...**

The girl came running to her mother.  
"Momma, momma, momma!" she cried excitedly.

The woman stirred and that was all.  
"Help me get her into the car," Alex puffed as he got up.

**See the face of fear running scared in the valley below...**

**Midnight, our sons and daughters;  
Cut down, taken from us...**

"That won't be necessary," said the girl calmly, no longer  
crying.

"What?" said Alex, bewildered, scared. He was truly too  
old for this.

**As we are born alone,  
We die alone.**

The girl's dark eyes turned red. She smiled.

**From the firefly, a red-orange glow...**

The woman sat up, unstable; her wounds almost healed. Alex was  
unable to move, paralysed by the girl's eyes.



**This guy comes up to me  
His face is red like a rose on a thorn bush...**

The woman smiled, her eyes deep, dark; her face ghastly  
white.

Alex felt weak.

"What are you?" he asked, scared.

"My name is Christine Belle," said the woman, her voice  
deep, full, sensous.

"What are you?" Alex asked again, feeling his age; older.  
And the woman appeared to be getting younger; her wounds  
healed. She was beautiful, with long golden hair and icy blue  
eyes.

**Allow me to introduce myself: My name, if you must know,  
Is Death.**

"Soon you will know who I am, old man," said  
Christine Belle. She rose slowly to her feet and advanced toward  
Alex, smiling.

Alex's thoughts ran together, to gibberish, thinking:  
"Christine Belle sounds like oh but that's impossible but it sounds  
like Christabel!"

His last thought before he died was that Coleridge never  
finished Christabel.

And the little girl—

**Nameless here for evermore...**



Debra Johnson

I

The gunman had missed; his bullet lodged itself in the wall behind Jake, who wasted no time, drawing almost without thinking.

For a moment the gunman refused to believe he was shot; he looked defiant and stood firmly rooted in his spot. Blood started at the corners of his mouth. He raised his Colt again, uncoordinated, heavy-handed. Jake fired again, and the color faded and washed out of the gunman's eyes.

Jake sucked in air through his teeth and started for the door, afraid that the encounter had taken too long, afraid that he would meet fifteen or so men with revolvers blocking his path. The thought flashed like hot pain through his mind, but there were no such men. The shots had awakened the men napping under the shady eaves of the saloon across the street, had attracted the attention of a few drunkards inside. One ambitious fellow went so far as to take a shot at Jake as he mounted, but he only succeeded in stirring up more dust in the street.

The sorrel picked up more speed with each long stride. It set a terrific pace, neck flattened and ears pinned. Its breath whistled fiercely, as the safety of the sagebrush loomed nearer.

Then came the impossible. At the edge of the town, a chestnut mare jogged out into the sage ahead. Her rider wheeled her around to face the on-coming horse and rider and aimed a Winchester carefully.

From where he sat, the rider could see the sorrel's star-face clearly. He sighted the rifle with a well-practiced hand, taking his time, but not so long that the shot would be off.

Jack winced; the rifle screamed. The sorrel slammed into the dirt with a hole the size of a silver dollar in its forehead where the white star had been. There was a snap as its neck broke, and it landed with its head twisted and eyes wide.

When Jake hit, his teeth snapped together and his ears rang. The dirt in his mouth was grainy, tasteless. He drew himself up to his knees, suddenly becoming aware that he still had one of the dead horse's reins in his hands. He had clutched it so tightly that releasing it was painful. When the last of the big blotches of color faded from his vision, he saw the chestnut's legs clearly. A cold

voice spoke from above, "Git up."

II

Three riders sat, staring stonily at the horizon. The town of Mesa Springs sat shimmering in the heat fumes that boiled up from the ground. Calvin Devane sat regarding the town for a time, then looked over at Harland Platt, who spoke in an off-hand manner.

"Reckon we'd better git a-goin'," Harland said, spitting tobacco juice at a horned toad sitting lethargically in the shade of a nearby boulder. He then flicked his hat back and regarded Billy Haggerty mildly.

"You sure this'll work, Harlan'?" Billy asked dubiously. He was not cut out to be a gunfighter; mostly he just played cards. He was a cheat, though, and that guaranteed gunplay.

"Course it'll work," was Harland's reply. "You just bring along that extry horse for Jake," he said, indicated the bay at Billy's side. Then he kicked his own horse into a trot and headed for Mesa Springs.

The sun had just begun its westward slant when Harland and Calvin walked into the jailhouse. The deputy was sitting behind a scarred desk, cleaning a rifle.

"What can I do for you?" he began, rising from his seat. Calvin cut him off, drawing his gun.

"Shut up an' set down," he said flatly, edging his way to the desk and taking the deputy's gun from its holster. He tossed Harland the keys to the cell and stared the deputy down with cold eyes. He was sufficiently bluffed, eyes darting nervously about the room, peering hopefully in the direction of the door.

Just as Harland entered the room with Jake in tow, Billy appeared in the doorway. He looked nervous. "Sheriff's comin'," he said, stepping inside and standing next to Jake.

All eyes fastened on the door. The sheriff walked up the steps, boot heels thumping on the dusty porch. They made scuffling sounds as he paused to open the door. The sun was a bright red ball glowing on the horizon behind him, and as he opened the door it flooded in. Then Calvin killed him. It only took one shot that sent him flying back into the street from where he had come.

There was a lingering stillness in the street as the gunshot died away, and even as the four men rode away, nobody moved.



The runner had fallen asleep that night with a sense of foreboding. He sat up in bed. Why was he in a cheap motel, in a hick town, running in a charity meet? The runner had never even heard of this place.

Slowly he climbed out of bed. Sleep hadn't helped his mood much. In the shower there was no hot water. Well, a cold one would have to do. Why do they always make the towels so small? You can never get dry with them.

The man pulled up his warm-ups and started out the door for his morning jog. "Where is everyone?" he thought to himself. "Last night people were camped right outside my door just so they could see me this morning. Now, their gear is here, but there are no people. Is Carl Lewis in the other motel?"

He knocked on his manager, Harvey's, door. There was no answer. Things were getting weird.

"They must all be down at the track," he said aloud, trying to attract attention to himself, but no one was there to hear.

He ran to his silver-black Porsche only to find he had locked his keys in his car. This was not the best of days.

"Well, it's only about three miles to the track and I need to warm up anyway."

As he set out he knew something wasn't right. There were cars still running, stopped in the middle of the road, but no one was inside them. His mind raced back to his college days when he read Walden. One statement always stuck in his mind: "Solitude is not measured in the miles of space that intervene between man and his fellows." Never could Henry David Thoreau have been more wrong. The runner was alone and scared. He broke out in a flat run to the track, checking every store along the way. Nothing .... no one. In the grocery stores there were carts filled with food at the checkout stands, but there were no people. In the parking lot, there were bags of food spilled on the ground. It was as if everyone had stopped what they were doing and left.

With only a mile to go to the track, the runner still had seen no one. He ran like the wind and ate up the mile in two minutes. Still, no one.

The gate to the track was open so he went inside. To his surprise, four men were sitting in high-backed chairs next to the track with their backs to him. Never had he been more glad to

see another human being. He ran to see them, only to stop and stare in blank horror. One of the men's faces had only a mouth, another, only a pair of eyes, another, only ears, and the last, only a nose. All had no hair and wore black suits, white shirts, and blood red ties. "We are Judgement," said one. "Your trial is at hand. Run!" The runner stood there, dumbfounded.

Suddenly the stands were full of people shouting in unison, "Run! Run!"

He ran blindly without thinking. He ran faster and further than he ever had before. Every time he passed Judgement, he counted a lap. He stopped counting somewhere around fifty, but still he kept on running, drawing power from the crowd. Then he fell, and all was silent. Even the wind stopped. All eyes were on Judgement.

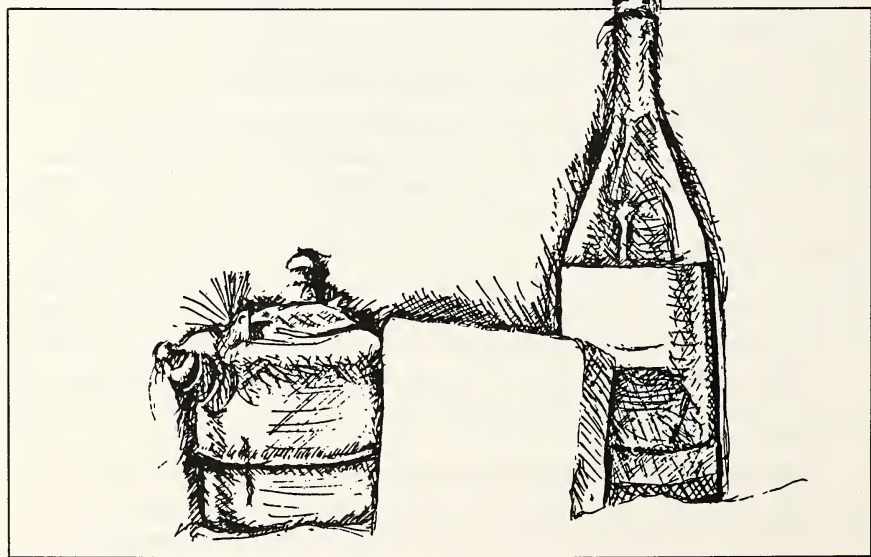
"Get up, runner," thundered Judgement.

"Get up, runner," chanted the crowd.

"Get up, get up," he heard, but it was Harvey's voice. The runner opened his eyes.

"Get up! The track opens in an hour," said his impatient manager.

The runner was still in a cheap motel, in a hick town, with hundreds of chanting fans outside his door. And that is exactly where he wanted to be.



*Glenn Guynes*

Everybody in town just called him Gunner. As long as I can remember, you could always find him hanging around the pool hall or sitting on the park bench. I don't think he ever had a steady job. He made enough money to live on by picking up cans and doing odd jobs and yard work for people. I also heard someone say he cashed his government check at the grocery store.

He couldn't possibly be as old as he looked. His hair was almost white and stringy. His face was worn and wrinkled like tanned leather and his dark eyes were barely noticeable under bushy white eyebrows. Everyone knew he had a wooden leg, and he walked with a noticeable limp. Gunner looked at least sixty years old. My dad said he and Gunner were about the same age, and my dad is thirty-nine.

Gunner was known as the "town drunk." I remember that he came to our church for a while, and our preacher talked Gunner into going into a hospital for therapy to be cured. I overheard someone say that he had been drinking ever since he came home from the war. Gunner was never cured.

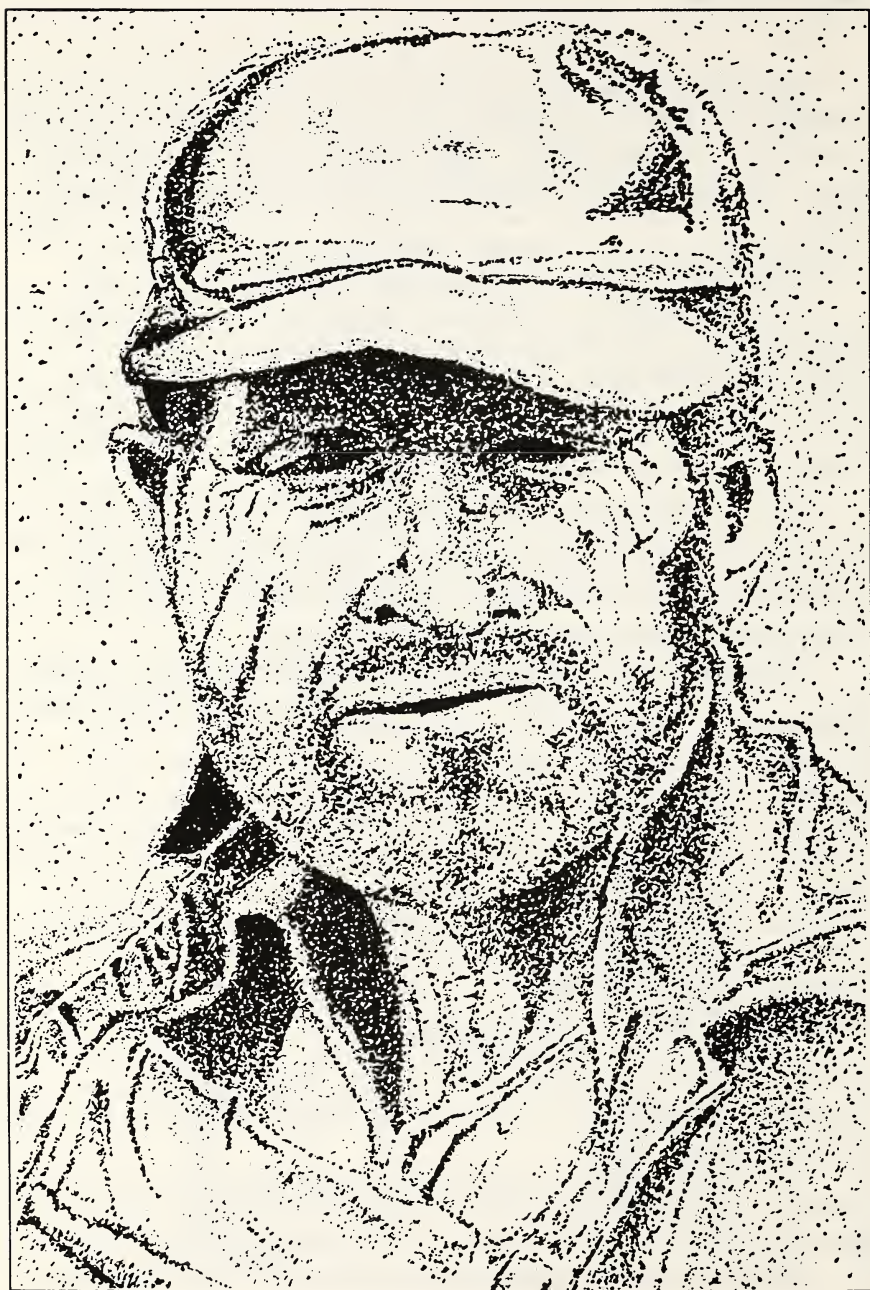
He drank more and more until he became very sick. Gunner didn't seem to want to get better and finally one Christmas day, Gunner died. Gunner didn't leave any money to pay for his funeral, so all the churches in town took up money to have a service. There were only a few people at the cemetery to pay their last respects. It was cold and raining and most of the people seemed as though they were only doing a good deed and didn't seem to really care that Gunner was gone, except for the four strangers that stood close to the grave. As Gunner was lowered into the earth, tears rolled slowly down their cheeks. They watched in dead silence until the deed was done and then began walking away from the cemetery.

It was the day after Christmas, school vacation, and I had toys to play with at home, but my dad made me go with him to Gunner's funeral. I just couldn't understand why. Gunner was just an old drunk.

As the four strangers walked past my dad and me, they overheard me complaining, "I don't know why we are here. What good did that old drunk ever do for the world? Let's go home!"

One of the men stopped and looked down into my face. He





said, "I would like to answer that question if you don't mind." I nodded my head but said nothing. I was embarrassed.

The man said he wanted to tell me a true story. "My friends and I fought in Viet Nam with Gunner. One day the five of us were ordered to set up a small artillery station high on a ridge overlooking a V. C. communications post. The machine gun was heavy, so we left it at the bottom of the hill and went on up to find a level place to put the gun. We didn't think any V. C. were in the vicinity. When we got to the top of the hill, we ran into a V. C. patrol, and they began shooting. We were unarmed.

"Gunner said he was going back down the hill for the gun. No one said anything because we were all anticipating death anyway, except Gunner.

Gunner crawled down the hill with bullets bouncing all around him. It was a slim chance for him to make it down the hill, and we knew the V. C. wouldn't let him make it back. Shortly after Gunner disappeared down the hill, the shooting stopped and we thought Gunner was dead.

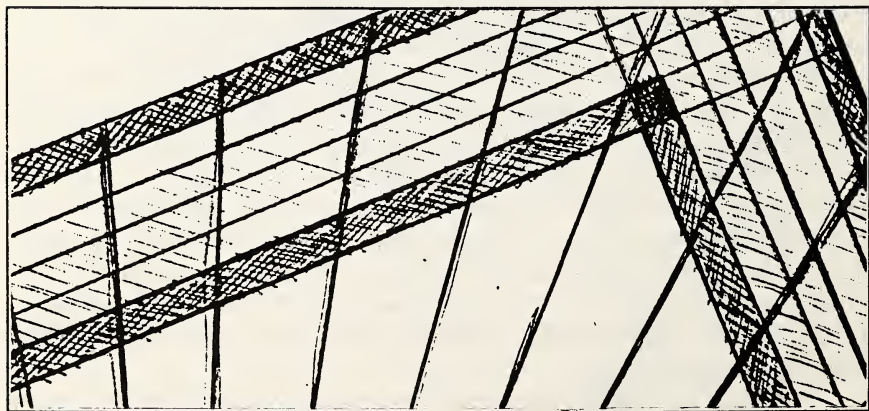
"The V. C. were so close we could hear them talking and twigs breaking beneath their feet. We thought our time had also run out. We pulled out our knives and tried to prepare ourselves for death. Then suddenly, we heard machine gun fire from the ridge. There stood Gunner with the huge machine gun strapped to his shoulder.

"The battle lasted for about ten minutes. The V. C. let Gunner have all the ammo they had, but he just kept firing. One bullet hit him in the hip and one in his right side. He kept falling to the ground, but he always got back up and never stopped firing. A third bullet crushed his knee cap and when it was over, there were fifteen dead V. C. and Gunner had earned a medal."

By this time I had tears in my eyes, but the man continued with his story. "I am a minister at a very large church. Without Gunner, I wouldn't be here. That real tall man over there is a surgeon who has saved hundreds of lives. The man in the grey suit is a lawyer and has done a lot of free work for poor people. The short man is a college professor. Anything we have done for society, we owe it all to Gunner. Gunner wasn't worth much in terms of money. The only things he had to his name were a small monthly pension and a Purple Heart medal, but we could never repay him for the lives he had given us."

The man put his hand on my shoulder and said, "I hope I have answered your question."

To some, the melodies  
of the cello and violin  
playing Mozart or Chopin  
To others, the pulsating combination  
of a guitar and set of drums  
commonly associated with Rock  
Still others, the piano  
of Duke Ellington  
and his Jazz Band  
Others, the steady beat  
of a steel guitar and fiddle  
in the field called Country  
Some, the wailing  
of Lucille or  
others with Blues  
Lastly, the blaring  
trumpets and trombones  
of the Big Band Generation  
To all, the happiness  
to which music brings  
no matter what variety  
into each of our lives



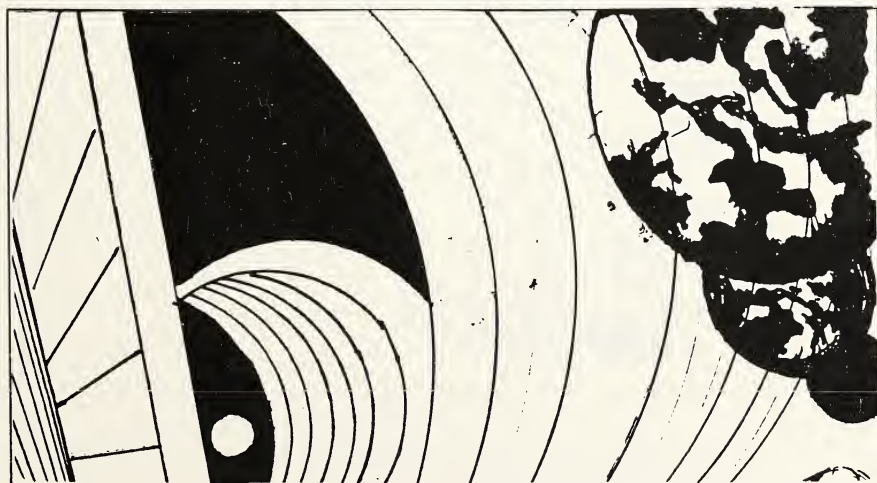


*Penny Bea King*

Yesterdays,  
treasured memories  
of times past  
Fill my senses like sweet perfume.  
They have made me what I am  
today.

Today,  
slowly changing,  
yet still the same  
Fills my head with different ideas.  
They are making me what I will be  
tomorrow.

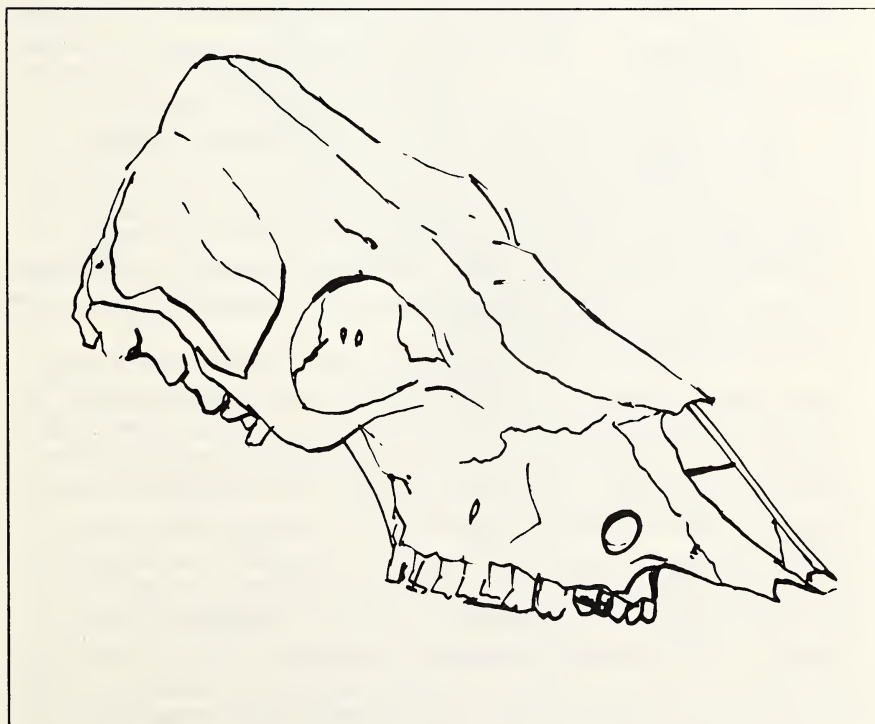
Tomorrows,  
breathtaking hopes  
of what is to come  
Fill my heart with timid anticipation.  
They will make me what I should have been  
yesterday.





Carousel dreams —  
Magical colors spinning round  
Kaleidoscope tears —  
Running rainbows on my face.  
The rider he's here  
On his unicorn of white.  
Glistening, the sun  
Sprays upon my seashell eyes.  
One look and he kneels.  
Dressed in white is he.  
Shimmering are the tracks of  
My tears making  
Upon the flesh of the land,  
Splashes of my kaleidoscope tears,  
Puddles running rampant  
That push me deeper  
Inside —  
Colliding with mirror images  
That shatter when hearts break  
And scream within  
Only to be pushed away and rehealed  
Then shattered once more  
While far away  
Carousel dreams  
Are being spun.

Among the trees  
and grass  
I saw a deer  
in full velvet  
in a wet  
creek  
coming  
hard  
nonstop  
to run fast  
breath full  
and feet moving  
through the dark woods.



Flannery O'Connor's, "Everything That Rises Must Converge," and Ann Petry's, "Like A Winding Sheet," show the conflict and irony of the relationships between blacks and whites. This conflict has been in existence since before the abolishment of slavery and with the termination of slavery both races had to make an adjustment. The white people had to learn to accept the blacks as people and as equals. Blacks had to learn to live as free people and not as slaves. For some, the situation was harder to accept than others. Since integration, writers such as O'Connor and Petry have used this subject to develop many stories about the roles and feelings between blacks and whites.

Mrs. Chestny, a Southern white woman, in "Everything That Rises Must Converge" and the black man in "Like A Winding Sheet" display similar feelings. Mrs. Chestny feels that things were better off when blacks were slaves. She holds a grudge against every black person she encounters. "The world is in a mess everywhere," Julian's mother said, "I don't know how we've let it get in this fix" (Drabeck 270). She feels she is superior to blacks because her grandfather was a former governor of the state, had a plantation and two hundred slaves and because her father was a prosperous landowner and her grandmother was a Godhigh. She takes the black struggle for integration as a personal insult, "but she bears the black man no ill will as long as he stays in his place (in the back of the bus and on his side of the fence)" (Walters 127). She is a "Southern lady" in reduced circumstances and now, bitterly but helplessly opposed to Negro integration, she sticks to her dignity (Pritchett 166).

Just as Mrs. Chestny feels discriminatory against blacks, the black man in Petry's story feels the same way towards whites. He is frequently late for work. When he arrives his white forelady harasses him about being late. She shows prejudice towards him and the other blacks. He tries to explain how his legs were bothering him but she does not listen. "And the niggers are the worse," she says, "I don't care what's wrong with your legs. You get in here on time. I'm sick of you niggers" (Drabeck 263). The black man feels embarrassed and furious. He feels a tingling sensation in his fingers as they form a clenched fist. He wants to hit the lady, but knows that would be wrong. "A woman could never hit back the same way a man could" (Drabeck 264).

Mrs. Chestny, as well as the black man in Petry's story, feels the opposite race is a threat and/or injustice to them. Mrs. Chestny is afraid to ride a bus alone for fear of blacks, and she forces her son Julian to ride the bus with her when she attends her weekly reducing class at the Y. She feels blacks are a threat to her because they no longer have to ride at the back of the bus. The black man goes to a restaurant after work to get a cup of coffee and feels there is an injustice against him when the girl serving tells him there will be no more coffee for awhile. He feels the tingling in his hands again as they clench into a fist. He leaves the restaurant with even more tension than before. "What he wanted to do was hit her so hard she would never refuse a man a cup of coffee because he was black" (Drabeck 266). What he does not realize is that the coffee pot is empty and the girl must make a fresh pot.

Mae, the black man's wife, and Julian, Mrs. Chestny's son also show some similarities. Julian's attitude is different from that of his mother's. He is not threatened by the black people and every chance he gets, he proves this to his mother. The fact that a black woman gets on the bus with an identical hat as Mrs. Chestny's makes Julian beam with joy. "He is truly happy to see his mother become purple-faced when he talks to a Negro and is still happier when the sight of the black woman wearing an identical hat turns her eyes a "bruised purple" (Hendin 106). Mae, like Julian, does not seem to take the gestures of the opposite race as seriously as her husband. She is ready to accept things as they are and get on with her life. She calls him a nigger in a humorous fashion, not as a white person might. "You're nothing but an old hungry nigger trying to act tough and...she pauses to giggle and continues" (Drabeck 267).

Ironically, Petry and O'Conner end their stories with at least one character undergoing an attack. Mrs. Chestny who suffers from high blood pressure explodes with a heart attack. The attack stems from her trying to give a black child a penny. The child's mother has been as patient as possible with Mrs. Chestny, but the penny sets her into a rage. "Then all at once she seemed to explode like a piece of machinery that had been given one ounce of pressure too much" (Drabeck 278). The black woman suffers an attack of rage and strikes Mrs. Chestny to the ground. This is more than Mrs. Chestny can take. She has never been treated this way by a black person before. Maddened by the blow, her blood pressure rises to "the height of death" as she



collapses on the sidewalk dying of a heart attack (Drabeck 278).

The black man from "Like A Winding Sheet," like the black woman and Mrs. Chestny, experiences an attack. His attack originates when he comes home from work. He has endured two white women—his forelady and the waitress—who he believes are prejudice. The tension these women have set within him has built up. When he arrives home and his wife Mae in a cheerful mood calls him a nigger, "The tension in his hands mounts up faster than ever and his fist shoots straight for her face" (Drabeck 267). He loses all control and keeps striking her time and time again in an angry attack to release the tension that has controlled him all day long.

Both writers show the conflicting feelings of blacks and whites. They unfold a world where a person "is not only destroyed but is pressured into becoming a part of the very society which he is fighting" (CLC 304).

The conflicts between blacks and whites have occurred in the South, North, East, and West. Yet these conflicts arise from within the characters. The conflicts stem from racial attitudes each one holds and they are activated by the intermost feelings of the individual. The feelings of the black man and Mrs. Chestny are hindering them from enjoying life. Julian and Mae, on the other hand, have put their feelings into perspective and have come to terms with the situation. Yet, Julian's mother and Mae's husband are unaware that they are hindering not only themselves but their wife and son from enjoying life and the company of others.

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*Allen Cooper*

To me there is nothing like being away from crowds of people and going to the woods. Whether it's two miles from town or two-hundred miles. There's nothing like the feeling a person can get by catching a fish and releasing it, contributing money to a wildlife restoration project or even hunting legally. As an avid outdoorsman I find it difficult to believe that people can poach animals six months before the season opens or kill twenty deer a season when the limit is five and still expect there to be a bountiful supply of wildlife for future generations.

I know a man near my hometown who, while dove hunting over a baited field, killed over eighty birds in a single afternoon! I personally believe if we are going to take from the land, we should take only what we need and give back as much as we take away. By the year 2000 one out of every five species on earth is scheduled to disappear. Hikers, campers, hunters, fishermen and birdwatchers must join together to raise funds for agencies around the world so that our children and their children will have streams to fish in, game to hunt and a clean atmosphere to live in.

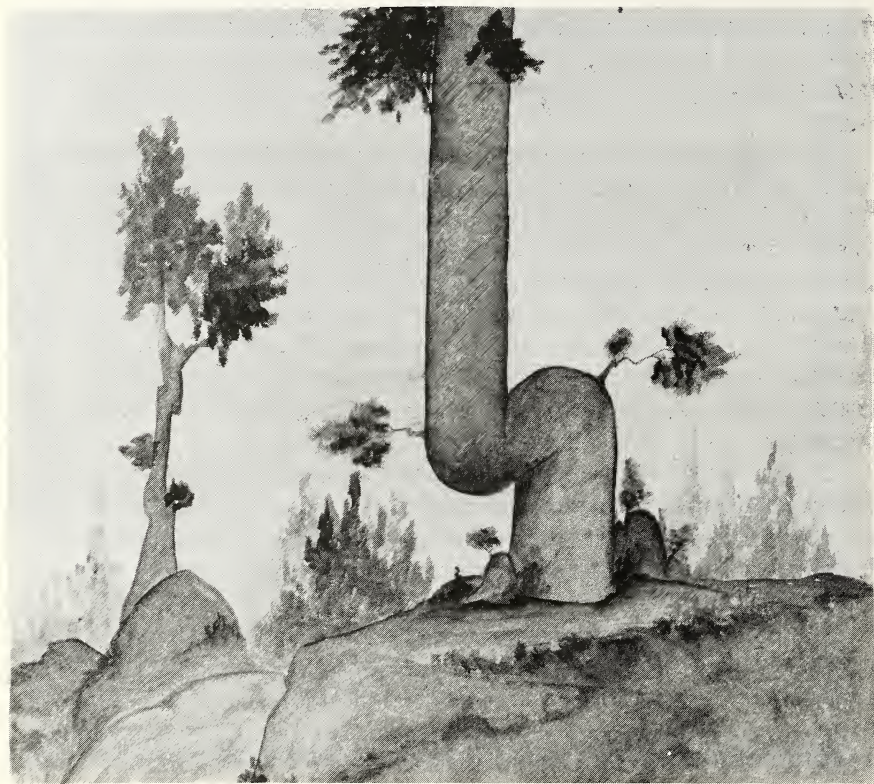
Everyday something tragic happens to our land and its inhabitants. Today a black bear was killed illegally a few miles away from the hunting club that I am associated with. The person who killed that bear knew it was an endangered species, but didn't care. In northern California a couple of uncaring hikers left a campfire unattended. The results of their non-observance to basic hiking and camping rules was expensive to taxpayers and a horrible nightmare for Wildlife Management, Firefighters and Conservationist. Apathy is one of the major problems in today's society.

Sure, there are private institutions in America fighting to preserve our wetlands, but not enough is being done. We lose millions of acres of wetland timber every year. We all share the land and, therefore, we must pull together to save a whale, plant a tree or clean the air.

Thanks to state government and non-profit organizations, bald eagles have made a significant comeback. Deer and turkey populations have almost tripled in the past twenty years. The more involved we are in our state parks, hunting laws and fishing laws the better the situation will become. State hunting and

fishing licenses account for a large percent of revenue for improvement of game and fish management programs, but it's going to take more than just money. It's going to take politicians, law enforcement officials and the people of the world working together to preserve the wilderness and the rights of those living creatures that have been here before we arrived. We must pull together to save the rain forests in South America, clean up after Exxon in Alaska and provide more habitats for the panda in China.

I have chosen Wildlife Management as a career and I want to serve Mississippi as a game warden or as a biologist for Mississippi Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. I hope I can help people understand that in order to have a wilderness in the future, we must prevent and treat the man-made diseases of nature and our environment with our relentless and immediate attention.





It has once been said, and I just remembered it right now, that "Toys are us." Now personally, I don't think I look exactly like a Cabbage Patch Kid, but you can keep your opinions to yourself on that. Even if toys are not us, though, they do play an intricate role in our culture. A recent study has shown that children spend up to one-half of their formative years playing with toys. Yet, the toys in our culture have been changing. They have become increasingly electronic, mechanized, and technological. Beep, beep, beep...

They are also less likely to be made specifically as a boy toy or a girl toy. An example of this is "Toy George," but when we look at the culture his club is in, we have to ask ourselves if these changes have been for the best.

In order to examine how these changes have adversely affected our children, I would like to toy with this issue from three angles. The actual changes from the 1800's to the present. The current popular types of toys and the effects these changes are having on our children should also be examined. Remember, however, that these are your children.

But, before we get into the history of toys, let us toy with the actual definition of the word. Now, few of you may realize that the word "toy" is derived from the Greek word "toi", meaning toy. Let us expand on that, shall we? A toy has been defined as an object, or a small replica of something familiar, something diminutive, especially in comparison to other objects. The story of my life. It has also been defined as something of little or no value, like the Mexican peso.

I might also add that another less popular definition of the word is a linen or wool cap with flaps down to the shoulders, traditionally worn by Scottish women. This has no relevance to my main point, but I thought I would just mention it.

So, after all of this research, I said to myself, "Self, what more can there be? Is this the be all, end all definition of toy?" And I replied, "Yeah."

So, now that we are past the definition of the word, let us look into the past and examine the history of how toys developed. I caution you, this may be a nostalgic experience.

Toys date back to the early 18th century when a man by the name of Albert Schoenhut, a close friend of yours and mine



developed a 9 x 10 inch metal airplane, called the "Air Devil." Although the Air Devil was not the first toy ever to be played with, it was the first toy ever to be marketed. And, it led to pure hell in terms of marketing. And let mah'tell you about it, or better yet, let Matel tell you about it.

It used to be that Ma would tell a child what kind of toy was appropriate to be played with regularly. Girls would generally play with dolls; boys would play with planes or wooden rocking horses. The emphasis of these earlier toys was on the home, farm, and work. Toys served a seemingly important purpose of developing traditional sex roles in our children. Stereotypes, if you will allow it. If you won't, please leave the room.

There were other unisex toys during this period also, such as the earthenware marbles. But, by the later 1800's, children began filling their pages in hopes of filling toy boxes. You probably think I'm full of it, but it is true. Think back to all those great toys and games you used to have. I told you this would be nostalgic. When we got bored with life, we got caught up in Twister. We bugged our parents for Cootie. Finally, we spent a lot of time in Candyland, which is so very close to "Toyland, Toyland." Sing along if you know the words.

Well, we've talked about past types of toys, that is history, but what are children playing with today? Now, while there are probably millions of types of toys out there in the hall, I would like to examine three of the more popular toys. We will check up on traditional toys, electronic toys, and those toys that are influenced by the media, which I shall creatively call "Media" toys.

First of all, traditional toys are those toys that have been around for a long time and still are being played with today. For instance Carol Channing's favorite, the dolly. What ever happened to the good old Barbie doll? You know, the one with one dress, one purse and two legs that did not bend. Today's Barbie dolls bend all over and she dresses like Alexis Carrington. She's ready for the movies, ready for jogging, ready for aerobics, ready for a night out. In fact, she's ready for everything except Ken. But how can you blame her? Who is ready for Ken? Perhaps it is one of the Care Bears: a modern version of the traditional teddy bear. No longer is Teddy a plain, brown mammal. Now personally, I could care less if my bear has a blue, half-moon on its belly. I don't pay my bear thirty bucks to moon me.

A third type of traditional toy is a boy toy. Remember GI Joe with the Kung-Fu grip? Well, I just got it from an inside source that

there is now a new GI Joe soon to be on the market. He is half man and half woman, and called, Gee, I don't know.

And what about those war toys; you know, those little plastic cowboy and Indian figurines that were frozen into one position? Okay, so that was two. Boy, oh boy, have we come a long way.

Today's modern, contemporary figurine is He-Man, Master of the Universe: Ninety-seven removeable parts, and three you dare not touch.

While these traditional toys have been played with for a long time, they have come a long way ... baby.

Yet, does the function fall short of the intended purpose? Sure, kids get a charge out of them and are ever ready to play, but perhaps not the charge they get out of electronic toys. Let me ask you a few questions: Will computer basketball bounce? Does Pac-Man need a den mother? Will you make an ass out of yourself playing Donkey Kong? These and other questions are needed to assess the tremendous influence that electronic toys have on our youth. Sure, they're fine if they promote thinking skills. I think. But does the Apple Computer, for instance, really get at the core of the imagination? Or is it taking a byte out of group play?

Which brings me, rather clumsily, to my third type of toy: the media toy. I would like for you to picture the following scenario: One hundred white-headed dwarfs talking themselves blue in the face; a brown alien with a huge index finger and a phone fetish; a red-haired orphan with no pupils in her eyes; and let's not forget the Michael Jackson doll. Who, like Michael, "Beat It." Now, whether we are talking about the Smurfs, E.T., Annie or Michael Jackson, media toys are nothing more than a product of very heavy advertising. And while our children are playing with these toys, the media are playing with our children, using their profit motives. Ooh, way too serious here. However, I bet those advertisers are laughing all the way to the bank. Yet, the effects these toys have on our children are not something to be ignored. To begin with, I will conclude that all toys can teach something to someone, somehow, somehow. And, to sum it up, a very recent issue of Psychology Today states that even the most advanced mechanical or electronic toys may teach manual dexterity, or eye-hand coordination. However, they do little to promote mental coordination.

I mean, how many video junkies do you know who are "A" students? I don't know, maybe a lot (bad example). But, even if

these toys do teach something, they might be teaching the wrong thing. How many times have your parents told you not to play with your food, and then buy you a Mr. Potato Head for Christmas? What's wrong here? Your child might end up in a Cabbage Patch with some other kids.

And, a third type of toy relates specifically to the media toys. Television in particular is taking our language and letting it go down the tubes. How? Cartoon characters, depicted on T.V., available in toy stores. They're teaching our children to talk wrongly. The Strawberry Shortcake Collection is a prime example. The little deserts have kids running around saying, "Have a berry nice day." And those Smurfs. They conjugate every verb using the infinitive "smurf." For example, "Let's smurf on over to Papa Smurf's house for some of those smurfy goodies." It makes me want to smurf up.

Calmly, though, I realize that toys have been around for a long time and probably will be around for an even longer time. Unfortunately, in this modern day and age, parents might not have as much time as they'd like to spend with their children. And the result - a child is left alone, isolated with a toy that might not promote much creative thinking.

So, maybe if toys are us, we should take a good look at who we are, and how much tinkering we need to do with our toys.

Now, we've talked about children's toys; where they came from, how they originated, how they've changed, what they are today. I think the next logical step would be to talk about adult toys: sailboats, VCR's, inflatable people.

Naw. I'll leave something to your imagination.



*Jan Brown*

Just seven years ago, in grass still damp from the morning dew, while searching for decorated Easter eggs, my daughter Carly found the kitten of her dreams. The family Easter egg hunt quickly became a kitten find. Since Carly was only three at the time, it really didn't matter to her that her kitten was just a plain brindled cat. This was not my idea of a dream kitten.

Carly took this tiny, gray-striped alley cat home. In a few days, I overheard Carly in her bedroom talking with her new pet. In a motherly voice, she said, "We are going for a walk now, Garfield; that's your name, okay?" Then as Carly dressed the kitten, I heard her say, "You have to wear a bonnet or your ears will hurt." I thought, a bonnet and Garfield? He did not look like a Garfield to me. The famous Garfield was orange, fat, intelligent and a super-funny celebrity. But just at that moment, ready for an afternoon stroll, Carly entered my kitchen with Garfield tucked in her doll stroller, wearing a lacy white bonnet made for a curly-haired little girl. They both seemed to be enjoying the soft yellow fragrance of the daffodils blooming outside the window and the merriment of the friendly bluebird sitting in the dogwood tree nearby.

These two inseparable friends found fun and folly in everything they explored. The time they spent together was quality time. As Carly talked to him, read to him, and played with him, he developed a very loving, caring, and sweet personality. She talked to him with love and he listened with his heart.

Garfield seemed to understand the quiet messages Carly shared with him. When it was time for him to eat, she would go to the kitchen and shake his catfood box; and he would come running fast. They communicated with one another in a special way that none of the rest of us could understand.

We lived across the street from the Elementary School when Garfield was small. This made it possible for him to be a regular visitor at P.T.A. meetings, recess or plays performed by the Little Theater. After a few visits, he officially became "Teacher's Pet." The children soon became a very important part of his life.

Quite unexpectedly a lady with the Little Theater came by our house one day to ask if Garfield could be in the upcoming play, The Southwest Corner, she would be directing. It seems she had heard about the cat who frequently visited the school. We were

thrilled to think our Garfield would be famous. He took his rehearsals very seriously. When it was time for him to be over at the stage door, much to our surprise, he went on his own.

Everyone who saw Garfield commented on how big and pretty he was, so when the newspaper had an invitation for children to enter their pets in the County Fair, Carly was ready and sure Garfield would win. She was right! He did win the first prize blue ribbon out of a menagerie of seventeen other cats for being the fattest and prettiest cat.

Well, after performing in his play, winning blue ribbons at the County Fair, and being the sweetest and friendliest cat on our block, Garfield is now content to just eat, sleep and wait for Carly to come home from school to spend the best part of the day with her dream cat. Oh, and yes, to Carly, the Garfield at our house is famous.



I gaze around me with eyes that don't quite see. They've seen enough, I think. Too much sorrow, sadness, and depression. It's over, all over. I see the barrel of the gun. It's shiny and sleek. It seems like an old friend come home. Its cold steel feels strange in my hand, but yet, it is a part of me. I stare at it and in my mind I am confused, lost. I look in the mirror hanging on the wall. A stranger looks back at me. I see the disheveled brown hair, and again, the eyes draw my attention...

Voices! Always the voices to interrupt my thinking! A body can't think around this place! The people in white...always white. They're the ones with needles, pills, and always questions. They always want to talk. I don't want to talk. They don't talk about things that I like. But it's their look; they look at me with pity and sympathy. How disgusting! It's sickening to even think about! They act like I'm a baby. They help feed, bathe, and clothe me. They also tuck me in at night. They say they understand. That's a joke to make the dead laugh! Ha! How ironic...and convenient, I think.

They're gone. My mind wonders, as always. It's like the lonesome tumbleweed blowing in the wind. I look again at the stranger in the mirror. The sixteen-year-old boy I see there is very different. I look away from the eyes. It's the eyes that scare me most. They have the detached look of a person that is not fully there. But if I'm not fully here or there, then where am I? Good question. Now I have something else to ponder.

Damn! Here's the nurse again. They're always here! They think I can't be left alone for long. Maybe they're right. What would I do? If they're ignored, they vanish, at least in my mind. I continue staring out my window as if no one were there. After all, there really isn't, is there?

The disfiguration of a branch reminds me of a gun, a particular one I used to know. It's loaded now—I raise it very carefully to eye level. I stare blankly down the barrel and all of a sudden thoughts go through my head...the nightmares that wake me in the middle of the night in a cold sweat, the sight of a friend in a casket, the guilt of knowing it should be me in there and not him. I see his parents, his little sister, his friends. They look at me and I shrink back. These thoughts are going through my head as my finger takes its rightful place on the trigger. And then...!



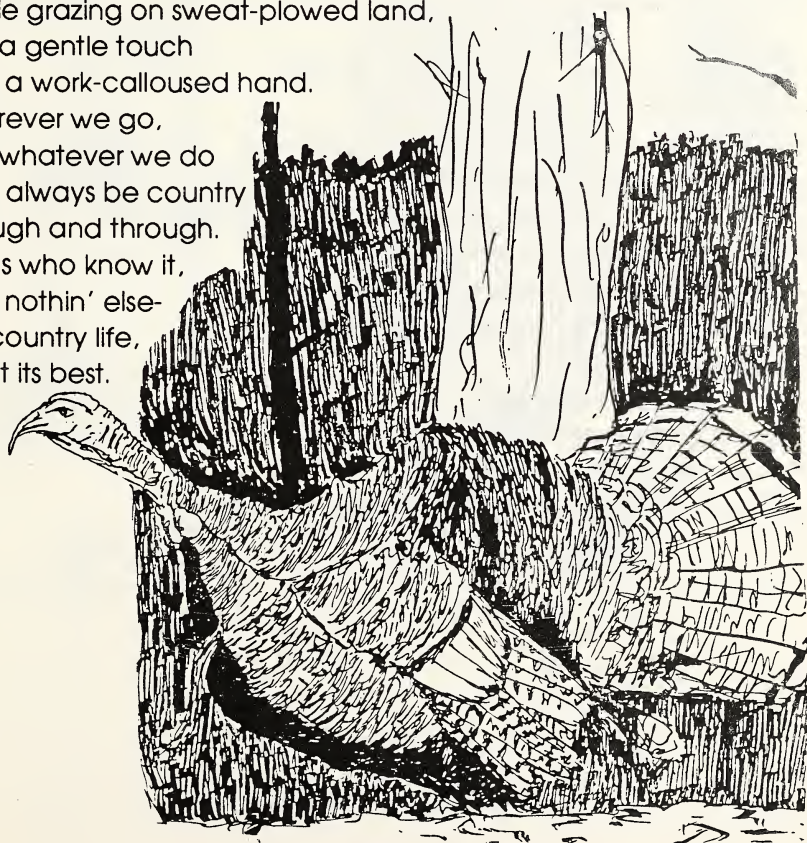
"Shaun! It's time for you to go to sleep now. Here, take this. It'll help." The nurse hands me a little pill. I take it mechanically, drawn out of my world. The bed is nice and warm on this cold January day. But the bed is of little comfort to a wandering mind. The doctors try to make me forget. My family tries to make me forget. It does no good. My mind is in a fog now, the pill taking affect.

The terrible fog haunts me with memories. It had been a great party. It was the last one before we graduated and went our separate ways. Everyone was happy and anticipating a bright future ahead. I didn't think I'd had that much to drink, but I guess I had. The road was full of curves that seemed to come alive like snakes. I'm late. I'll be grounded. I have to get him home first. I speed up. Something is wrong! I look up, but not in enough time to miss the big pine tree looming at me from out of the darkness. There is a sickening sound of tearing metal; Eric screams! I black out and leave the wrenching pain. Next thing I remember is seeing all of the lights and all of the people in a hurry; everyone shouting at each other. Where are they going? Where's Eric? I can't find Eric...Eric!

I'm awake again. The nurse is here, always here. She wipes the sweat from my face. The fear from the nightmare is still with me. I hate where I am now. I hate being here because I was found with a bullet embedded in my skull, another goof up of mine. I missed! They say I can't cope with the guilt; they're right. I'd rather be dead. Can't they get the picture? I was stopped then, but I know that there is always...another day.

*Rose Brown*

Country life is in our blood—  
clean country air  
and deep country love.  
Roosters in the morning,  
and crickets after dark,  
country on our radio  
and country in our hearts.  
A cool breeze under  
rustling oak leaves  
and listening to thunder,  
yet feeling at ease.  
Cattle grazing on sweat-plowed land,  
and a gentle touch  
from a work-calloused hand.  
Wherever we go,  
and whatever we do  
we'll always be country  
through and through.  
For us who know it,  
ain't nothin' else—  
just country life,  
life at its best.



A lady in a shiny cutlass smiles, saturnine,  
as the wrecker runs over a tennis  
shoe on the asphalt.

I don't think she even noticed my  
damaged car.

I knew it was coming:

Last night five grasshoppers were lined  
up on my car's antenna,

Each screaming its omen in undetectable high  
pitch language.

On my way back from the field of ancient short-  
lived cars, walking,

I stop by His house.

His yard is just as hard and stony as that  
of a welcomed den of flesh eaters.

Has He forgotten me? Does He know me?

Am I but a walking form of flesh,

decaying, with no chance of rebirth?

How am I worthy of invitation?

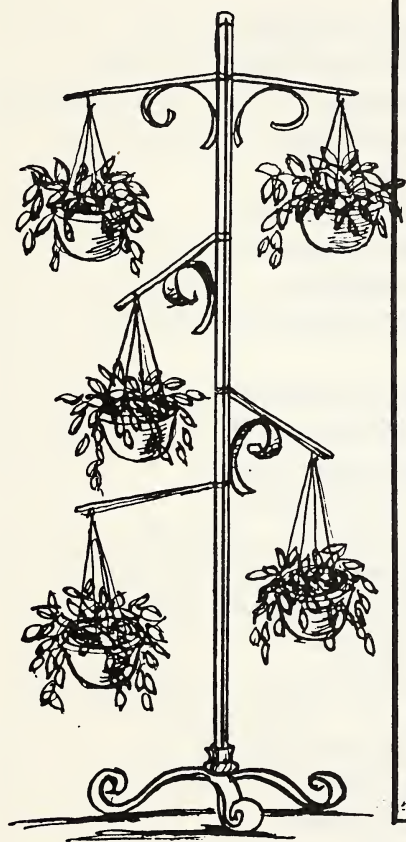
The playground's hollow-hinged metal,  
squeaking its haunted, half-forgotten  
memories

draws my attention away.

I see myself standing there, standing between  
the swings, holding cold chains.

Around me an angry, violent sky: red——distant.





If it stands guilty that  
all poets have a hidden,  
insane activity,  
then I truly am a poet.

If I can look at myself  
in the mirror every day  
and night,  
then I am a fool.

If I continue to nourish  
my vice with desperate,  
demanding pleas,  
then I am a gambler.

If I continue to beg  
for forgiveness on a dark,  
lonely night,  
then I am a gambler.

If I can look at myself  
and not see corrupt,  
evil deeds,  
then I am a fool.

If I stand guilty at my  
trial in death  
upon judgement,  
then I am truly a poet.

Aimee Harris

Mr. Hay must have loved the smell of the woods, a rain in June,  
the sight of deer coming to the lake on a July morning, and the  
rising orange moon of August.

You do expect the heat, bugs, snakes, kids  
falling from the top bunk at 2 a.m., no hot water,  
and army food so you buy baby powder and Deep Woods Off,  
pray against snakes and kids falling out, and learn to  
live with the rest.

The rest includes no make-up, no time to yourself,  
no sleep, no silence, no boys (besides other  
counselors), no MTV...but there are some perks:

lots of girl-talk, hugs and kisses morning  
and night, and sixty admiring suitors between the ages  
of seven and fourteen each week.

What you don't expect is these smiling faces  
stealing your heart, drinking your Coke, sleeping  
in your bed, and otherwise invading your life.

Otherwise includes answering questions nobody else  
will, listening to the life behind the smile,  
being buddy, missionary, counselor, hero,  
but mostly friend.

When the next week comes, and you can't sleep,  
is it because Ashley may fall out of the top bunk,  
or is it a smiling face from last week?  
probably both —

the greatest job you'll ever love is  
at John I. Hay.



Schandmauer\*

A symbol—that is what I am,

And although I have been transformed,

I was the ultimate statement of the  
long forgotten cold war.

Time made me famous.

One-hundred miles of concrete and  
barbed wire, I stood naked  
Before the world.

I was much to many.

I watched in silence as would-be  
artists transformed me into an  
international canvas or little known  
poets inscribed

On me an unpublished scroll for the  
world to read.

I was the speechless sentry for three  
decades.

Fashioned and shaped to serve, I  
without wanting or  
knowing became a synonym of  
death—the gravestone.

I was the keeper of secrets—for I  
heard many.

I was the altar where candles split  
darkness to keep one  
Side of me warm.

I was the shadow maker, a turning  
point, a screen where man  
Could see life dancing before him  
side-to-side but never  
Forward.

I was a place where flowers grew—a  
small, constant reminder That I had  
more than one purpose.

Firmly planted in a place to make a  
political statement,

I grieved at my destiny.

Oh, to be like the Great Wall of  
China, a wonder of the

World, or to be the keeper of safety  
for small children

So easily I could have been the  
heartbeat of a magnificent  
Cathedral or a sanctuary for the  
performing arts.

I could have been a watchtower or  
a bridge to provide

Safe passage across turbulent water.

I could have been stepping stones in  
a peaceful garden or a

Sidewalk in a busy city.

I could have been the foundation for  
an embassy whose

Purpose was to promote interna-  
tional peace.

So many things I could have been,  
but I was Schandmauer,

And tears could not penetrate  
through me although I was  
Bathed in many.

Words combined and spoken in four-  
year segments made their

Way to history books as they, one by  
one, bounced off me.

Great words and countless speeches  
 could not and did not  
 Pierce me—although, I longed to let the  
 words pass.  
 I was the back drop—the sounding board,  
 the prop that  
 Held an iron curtain in place.  
 I watched children play and was touched  
 by the innocent  
 Laughter of their youth.  
 I watched as a city leaped through the  
 years and began to  
 Show abstraction in asymmetrical design  
 because of me,  
 And I could do nothing but stand there.  
 A landmark in Berlin that absorbed  
 profanity in many  
 Languages, I took verbal abuse that  
 belonged to the communist  
 Creators—still, silently, I stood consoled by  
 the  
 Dim flicker of candles and the knowledge  
 that I could have  
 Been something else.  
 Freedom was a word that I often heard—it  
 echoed down the  
 Span of my one-hundred miles of unwilling  
 being—for three  
 Decades that word chiseled away at me.  
 I ignored it, because thinking about it was  
 too painful.

I was Schandmauer, a synonym of  
 death—a gravestone.  
 Freedom was not the key word in the  
 political statement that  
 I was destined to make.  
 Resolved, I accepted the fact that  
 erosion, not freedom  
 Would be the only liberator that I  
 would ever meet.  
 Freedom came in the form of  
 candles splitting the night on  
 Both sides of me.  
 It came in the realization that life  
 could dance forward  
 Without casting shadows—that I was  
 no longer a screen—  
 The turning point where dreams end.  
 Although time made me famous, it  
 did not drown the cries  
 Of the oppressed.  
 It did not hide the names that were  
 carved on me by death.  
 Schandmauer, a symbol, that is what  
 I am.  
 The ultimate political statement—  
 now in segments, a gift to  
 The world with each piece of me  
 representing freedom.  
 No longer the "wall of shame,"  
 I am the Berlin wall—I am small  
 pieces of hope for the  
 World to cling to.

\*Schandmauer is the German name  
 for the Berlin Wall.

WE STAND AMAZED  
at a man; a  
prisoner of war  
who still walks tall.

Blood pours from  
each  
portion of his being;  
mouth, eyes, limbs.  
He speaks slowly.

"Help me please"  
then he falls  
to his knees  
and dies.

WE STAND AMAZED  
at a child  
bloated, not with  
food  
but with hunger.

Bare skin  
plagued with  
disease  
and poison;  
crawling insects.

WE STAND AMAZED  
at the human mind.  
A man shoots a  
gun,  
or swings an ax,

leaving another  
to die.  
Because of what?  
A disease of the  
mind?

This disease  
gives him freedom  
to wound  
and kill again.

WE STAND AMAZED  
at a country  
where a teenager  
cries at night,

happy to all  
of her friends,  
until she takes  
the last pill,

then she dies  
and we cry  
but why? She  
begged for help.

DO WE STAND  
in awe of blood  
shed in the inno-  
cence of faith.

A crown of  
piercing thorns.  
A heavy cross;  
the weight of  
death.

The rip of flesh,  
the cry of pain,  
a man who says  
"Father, forgive  
them."

WE STAND AMAZED  
because through  
our polluted sky  
we no longer see,  
the face of God.



Dawn beckons him on his trip

A babe born in Acadia—mossy bayous, wilderness  
Cajun French surrounds him.  
A sister, Lily, three brothers—  
Marcelle, Clebert and Charlie.  
Mama and Papa both are strict.  
A sleepy-eyed six-year old—up at four  
Stumbling toward the old iron pot-bellied stove  
His chore, stoking the fire and carefully dripping  
The robust Cajun coffee.

Gathering cleaning rags and jugs of water

Running to the bayou to fetch a bucket of water  
A quick detour at the swinging vine, knowing that  
A switching would be awaiting him for his out-burst  
of play  
Still age six, the long rifle almost too heavy to  
steady,  
He kills his first deer. The woods beckon him,  
The earth sustains him. Game abounds.  
"Best woodsman all around," they say.

Mingling thoughts of Mama and Papa

A handsome man, long and lean, honor learned  
"Mick is a man of his word," they say.  
Lucy Borel, lovely, sweet and shy, smelling like  
fresh cut soft roses, took his eye and caught his  
heart.

Bouquet of roses in weathered rough calloused hands

Love of country, he volunteered  
Off to World war number one  
Through five great battles, he was spared.

Trip of forty miles ahead

Back home again, he and Lucy tied the knot  
And made their little nest on Bayou Alabame  
Soon they were four, Juanita and Winona entered  
in.

Later, a new home on the Atchafalaya.  
Like his parents, Mick is strict.

An annual pilgrimage to parents' grave

Up at four, strokes the fire, drips his coffee  
And off to run the nets. The seasons come and go,  
Still, he runs the nets.  
Carnation milk, devil's food cake,  
Coffee snack... fish galore  
Juanita, then Lucy, here no more.

Whitewashed tomb to clean and flower

His muscles shrinking—his mind alert  
Memories take him back over his  
Ninety-five years on earth.

Slower faltering steps toward the grave

Tales of war, he relates  
"Pa, who did you see first when home again?"

Tomb cleaned, flowers in place

"My mama," he says softly...  
"Did she say, 'Mick, get to work'?"

Softly, he bows his head and says a prayer

"No...she cried."  
Then...

He bowed his head and wept.

*Van Turner*

Music is your language.

Some people speak German, others French.  
Some people speak with the beauty of art,  
Or the art of literature.

Music is your language.

To hear you play sends my heart racing,  
My mind reeling, my spirit soaring.  
To see you play inspires me.

Roses are your flowers.

When you see roses, I feel your excitement;  
I feel your joy and mine in your feeling so.

Roses are your flowers.

You compliment them.

You are beautiful.

Beautiful doesn't capture you.  
Nor does radiant, magnificent, extravagant;  
No single word could describe.

You are beautiful.

To use one word would limit you.  
Yet it's hard to find enough words,  
Or not to use too many.

These are all part of the most

Wonderful thing to ever happen to me.

You have shown me feeling

For music I didn't like,

For roses I took for granted,

For beauty indescribable.

I love you.

### Cast Of Characters

**FANNIE WILSON** is a large well-dressed black woman in her late sixties. She is carrying a large purse. She constantly wipes perspiration from her upper lip and forehead.

**MAYBELLE WILSON** is a skinny black woman in her late sixties. She wears rhinestone jewelry, black high-heeled shoes and carries a brown paper bag.

**STEVE** is a slender black man. He is very well dressed in his shiny black suit, white shirt and black tie. Thirtysomething.

**MR. WINGER** is a black man. He is wearing a black suit, white shirt and black tie. He is a very nervous man.

The setting is the office of Winger's Funeral Home. There are two sets. Both are visible at all times. Inside Winger's office there are several chairs, filing cabinets and a large desk. Outside the doors to the office is a portable electric sign flashing, WINGER'S FUNERAL HOME.

( FANNIE and MAYBELLE WILSON are standing down stage right. They are about to enter into the Winger Funeral Home to make final arrangements for the burial of their husband.)

**FANNIE:** Lord, I hope this ain't gonna take long. I'll bet it cost an arm and a leg to bury that no-good man.

**MAYBELLE:** Calm down, dear. Don't worry. We'll keep it small. Don't nobody on the face of the earth realize we was both married to that no-good man. We gots to act grieved or folks will be thinking the truth.

**FANNIE:** The truth is we been married to the same no-good man for fifty-seven years.

**MAYBELLE:** We gots to act a little grieved. Find yo'self a hankerchief. Use it ever now and then.

**FANNIE:** It's gone be downright hard to act like I cared a toot for Hirim when he's been married to YOU AND ME for fifty-seven years. Downright hard. Probably impossible.



(They practice blowing in their hankies)

**FANNIE:** All those years he said he was a traveling for the VFW. He was with you in Alabama.

**MAYBELLE:** All them times I thought he was working for the NAACP. He was with you here in Mississippi.

**FANNIE:** We'll keep it real small. I hear this Mr. Winger is a crook.

**MAYBELLE:** I bet by the time we get Hirim Wilson buried we'll both be broke to get in the poor house. Should of left him in the pen or should've dragged him to yo' pond.

**FANNIE:** Lord. Not my pond. Not ruin my fishin'.

**MAYBELLE:** Hush-up and be nice. How you know Winger is a crook?

**FANNIE:** Everybody knows. Besides, I heard Annie May Brown say that she heard Roosevelt Washington say that Winger stole Sister Loula Brent's mother-in-law's gold teeth right out of her head. I don't know if I want to do business with a crook. Why you laughin'?

**MAYBELLE:** You. I'm laughing at you. You calling him a crook and me and you are murder....(Fannie slaps her hand over Maybelle's mouth)

**FANNIE:** Don't you say that word. Not ever or ever or ever.

**MAYBELLE:** What word?

**FANNIE:** M.U.R.D.E.R. That word. We confronted him with the fact that we found out about each other through the travelin' preacher, the good Reverend Jones. The fact is the fact. We been married to the same man for fifty-seven years. We cain't help if we got upset and blew up right there next to the hog pen.

**MAYBELLE:** We did shove him in the hog pen backwards.

**FANNIE:** But how was we to know that the big ol' hogs, his pets, were gone tromple him to death.

**MAYBELLE:** Didn't know. No, Lord.

**FANNIE:** We was mad and not in the most helping mood. And honest as Abe we didn't try and help him when he kept falling down and getting up and falling down and getting up and falling down and...

**MAYBELLE:** That don't mean we... (motions slicing throat)

(They both shake their heads)

**MAYBELLE:** When I get back to Alabama I'm just gone say he disappeared. Then, later on I'll say he killed over in Mississippi or something.

**FANNIE:** Sounds good. You can figure out the details later.

**MAYBELLE:** Well, let's get on with it.

(Lights come up brighter on Mr. Winger and Steve. Mr. Winger is

seated at his desk. Steve is filing papers.)

**FANNIE:** YOOOOOOOOOOHOOOOOOOOo. Anybody home?

(Both men are startled. Mr. Winger knocks over a quart jar of Roloids.)

**STEVE:** Come in ladies and be seated. I'm Mr. Winger's assistant. My name is Steve and if I can be of any service to you just let me know.

**MR. WINGER:** Thank you, Steve, that will be all. (Steve leaves the room.)

**MAYBELLE:** We sorry we scare you.

**MR. WINGER:** No harm done. Now, which one of you lovely ladies is Mrs. Wilson?

**FANNIE and MAYBELLE:** I is.

**FANNIE and MAYBELLE:** She is.

(Winger is noticeably confused)

**FANNIE:** We mean we both is.

**MAYBELLE:** What she means is that I'm Mrs. Wilson and she's Mrs. Wilson.

**FANNIE:** She means she's Hirim's sister. That's why her name is Mrs. Wilson. They didn't know about each other until yesterday.

**MR. WINGER:** This would make a wonderful story for the weekly paper.

**MAYBELLE:** NO. Hirim was a very private man. Kept family things to hisself. We wouldn't want to do things against his wishes.

**FANNIE:** NO, Lord.

**MR. WINGER:** Of course not.

**FANNIE:** I hear this takes half a day to arrange things.

**MR. WINGER:** Making final arrangements for a loved one, such as Mr. Wilson, is very difficult.

**FANNIE:** Hirim was difficult.

**MAYBELLE:** (whispers to Fannie) Let me handle this. Don't get yo'self all upset.

**FANNIE:** You gonna be upset too when you hear how much it cost.

**MR. WINGER:** Excuse me, but is there anything in particular you had in mind?

**FANNIE:** How much is cremation?

**MAYBELLE:** NO. LORD, NO. Don't fry the man. He done been trompled to death by hogs.

**FANNIE:** Ashes to Ashes. Is it cheaper? (whispers to Maybelle) Should've left him in the hog pen.

**MR. WINGER:** Please ladies step over here and I believe we can

accommodate everyone. (They all move down stage left and look out toward audience as if the caskets are before them.) As you can see the first one is are most expensive one and most beautiful. That one is \$8,900.00. It is guaranteed against water, corrosion and fire. Perhaps the one next to it would be of interest to you? It's only \$5,300.00. Of course, those prices reflect all the preparations of the dearly deceased.

**MAYBELLE:** Perhaps the one all the way down on the other end would please us most.

**MR. WINGER:** (becoming irritated with them) That's not a casket. That's just a cardboard box used for shipping bodies by air.

**FANNIE:** He ain't goin' up. More likely he needs the fire protection.

**MAYBELLE:** What about the one next to it?

**MR. WINGER:** That's our least expensive model. It's only \$400.00 and it isn't guaranteed against anything. IT'S CHEAP.

**MAYBELLE:** It's Hirim. We'll take it.

**FANNIE:** That didn't take half a day.

**MAYBELLE:** What's next?

**MR. WINGER:** We need to set a time for the funeral.

**FANNIE:** We don't want no frills. I'll do the talking. Won't be no eulogize'.

**MAYBELLE:** Won't need no preacher.

**FANNIE:** All we really need for you to do is lower him down and cover him up.

**MR. WINGER:** (very upset) In that case I believe we can accommodate you for under a thousand dollars. (eats more Roloids) What time of day would you like to do all this, so called ceremony? (he sits down)

**MAYBELLE:** I don't get up before seven and I have to do my hair. I do my own hair myself. Do you think I need a relaxer?

**FANNIE:** I was in hopes you would ask me that very question. You most certainly do. You real kinked.

**MR. WINGER:** AMEN.

**MAYBELLE:** Thank you so very much for your opinion.

**FANNIE:** You asked for it. I let Angel Mitchell do mine. She's sharp. She can curl you and not kink you.

**MR. WINGER:** (he eats another Roloids) Ladies, may we decide on a time?

**FANNIE:** You shouldn't do your hair yourself anymore. Period.

**MR. WINGER:** Excuse me, ladies.

**FANNIE:** One o'clock would be good. Don't you think one o'clock would be good?



**MAYBELLE:** Sounds good.

**MR. WINGER:** What about visitation?

**FANNIE:** They can visit him at the cemetery. Cost money to visit him here. Besides, there'll be a whole boat load of his cousins coming down from Inverness and those people are trouble.

**MR. WINGER:** Thank you.

**MAYBELLE:** I didn't know he had cousins in Inverness. He told me he was an orphan child and didn't have a stitch of kin. He let you get to know his kin?

**MR. WINGER:** I don't understand.

**FANNIE:** (says to Maybelle) You ain't missed nothin'.

**MR. WINGER:** (he's eating Roloids like popcorn) I guess there's only one thing left. What clothes will he be wearing?

**MAYBELLE:** I got them here in this paper bag.

**FANNIE:** He won't be wearing no jewelry. See you tomorrow.

**MAYBELLE:** His Fruit of the Looms and socks is on the bottom.

(Maybelle hands Mr. Winger the paper bag and they leave)

(Lights stay up on both sets. Steve comes into the office and he and Mr. Winger whisper about what has just happened. Maybelle and Fannie stand outside the door and talk.)

**FANNIE:** Well, it's not going to be a very nice funeral, but it's all he deserves. Are you hungry?

**MAYBELLE:** Now that you mention it, I am a little empty.

**FANNIE:** Let's haul all Hirim's junk to the dump.

**MAYBELLE:** That man had more junk than you ever saw in your life.

**FANNIE:** He did leave me one somethin'.

**MAYBELLE:** What?

**FANNIE:** A \$10,000.00 accidental life insurance policy. And guess what?

**MAYBELLE:** What?

**FANNIE:** Gettin' stomped to death by a bunch of hogs is classified accidental death.

**MAYBELLE:** I got me one, too.

**FANNIE:** You got a policy? Lord knows what we needed.

**MAYBELLE:** We both rich.

**FANNIE:** Let's take a vacation. A real vacation. I always dreamed of goin' on one of them cruises. I carry this here brochure around with me everyday of my life.

**MAYBELLE:** Like Love Boat? Does black folks go on cruises?

**FANNIE:** Oh yes darlin'. We can do anything we want to do.

**MAYBELLE:** That's right.



(Mr. Winger and Steve are sitting down)

**Mr. WINGER:** Get me another bottle of Roloids. Maybe I just need a vacation. I have never had to deal with anyone like those two before in my entire life. They drove me crazy.

**STEVE:** Vacation sounds nice. You deserve it.

**Mr. WINGER:** You're right, I do deserve it. Get my travel agent on the phone. I've been saving this brochure. A seven- day cruise to the Virgin Islands.

**STEVE:** Yessssss Sir.

(Mr. Winger talks on the phone and looks at the brochure)

**MAYBELLE:** Do you feel just a little bit guilty?

**FANNIE:** Nope.

**MAYBELLE:** You don't think they'll ever find out we let them hogs tromple Hirim to death?

**FANNIE:** We didn't. How were we to know he was gone lay there and get hisself killed. We didn't give 'em hogs instructions.

**MAYBELLE:** The Bible says if you lie with the hogs you die with the hogs.

**FANNIE:** Bible says cain't have but one wife.

**MAYBELLE:** Says an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

**FANNIE:** He jilts us. We jilts him.

(Back to Winger and Steve. Winger is still on the phone)

**Mr. WINGER:** Sounds wonderful. I'll have my wife pick up the tickets.

**STEVE:** Sounds like you are on your way to a great cruise.

**Mr. WINGER:** Yep. Right after the Wilson funeral tomorrow. Seven days of peace and quiet and fun in the sun.

(Back to Maybelle and Fannie)

**FANNIE:** Let's stay gone a week. I hear they feed you eight times a day on those cruise ships. I've had this brochure in my purse for a long time. I've been dreaming of this day. See, eight meals a day. Ship stops in St. Crow x, (St. Croix) St. Thomas and all over the Virgin Islands.

(Back to Winger and Steve)

**Mr. WINGER:** St. Croix, St. Thomas and all over the Virgin Islands and eight meals a day. Cain't beat that.

(Back to Maybelle and Fannie)

**MAYBELLE:** They have ships daily. Let's get one that leaves tomorrow.

**FANNIE:** Let's call them and see if they got one that leaves right after the funeral.

**MAYBELLE:** But don't tell anybody 'cause they might think it bad

of us for not hanging around and mourning for awhile.

**FANNIE:** That's true. We won't tell a soul. (They go over the brochure)

(Back to Winger and Steve)

**STEVE:** I wouldn't tell anyone that I was going if I were you. Bad luck you know. Every time....

**MR. WINGER:** Every time I plan something, something spoils my plans. Don't tell a soul.

**STEVE:** I won't. You folks have a nice trip and don't worry about a thing here.

**MR. WINGER:** Those two old ladies will have driven me crazy by tomorrow afternoon. I think I'd rather go skydiving without a parachute than deal with them another day.

**STEVE:** They probably drove the poor old man crazy.

**MR. WINGER:** He probably threw himself in the hog pen.

(They laugh and act wild. Winger shakes his Roloids bottle and dances around the room singing calypso music with Steve)

(Winger and Steve are still reading the brochure)

(Maybelle and Fannie are reading their brochure outside the door)

**MR. WINGER:** BARBECUES.

**STEVE:** BARBECUES.

**MAYBELLE:** BARBECUES.

**MR. WINGER:** CALYPSO BANDS.

**STEVE:** CALYPSO BANDS.

**FANNIE:** CALYPSO BANDS.

**MR. WINGER:** DESERTED BEACHES.

**STEVE:** DESERTED BEACHES.

**MAYBELLE:** DESERTED BEACHES.

(WINGER clasps brochure to his chest)

**MR. WINGER:** TOMORROW!

**STEVE:** TOMORROW!

**MAYBELLE AND FANNIE:** TO HIRIM!

The End

*Micki Freels*

**CHARACTERS:**

Justin Walters - Chief of Detectives  
Jessie Powell - Just committed a murder  
Shayla Davis - Defense Attorney  
Prosecutor  
Matron

**SCENE I**

**SETTING:** Interrogation room of a police station in a large city.

**Walters:** My name is Justin Walters. I'm going to be in charge of your case.

**Jessie:** ( No response.)

**Walters:** I understand from the arresting officer you have been advised of your rights and do not wish to have an attorney present. Is this correct?

**Jessie :** ( No response.)

**Walters:** Have it your way. Let's see (scanning paperwork) you are Jessie Powell and you are here from the big city of Houston. Do you mind telling me what you're doing here?

**Jessie :** ( Still no response.)

**Walters:** Look, lady! you can sit there with your mind shut until doomsday if you like and I can't do a thing to you. But you can't just come into this city, murder some guy, and expect us to pat you on the bottom and send you home!

**Jessie :** ( Standing in rage) For your information MISTER Chief of Detectives, that man wasn't just any guy. Thanks to him I no longer have folks to go home to!

**Walters:** Well now. She can speak. Then you can tell me about what happened in your hotel room last night.

**Jessie :** Why? It won't make any difference. I did what I had to do and I'm not sorry.

**Walters:** Humor me then. Help me understand why in the hell a pretty little gal from Texas comes all the way up here, just to rip some guy apart!

**Jessie :** Detective, tell me how you would feel if some degenerate bastard just waltzed into your life one day, killed the only family you had, and then worse, left you alive? Tell me what you would do.

**Walters:** I'm not sure. But let's start with this degenerate bastard. Did he have a name?

**Jessie** : Yeah. Larkin Reynolds.

**Walters**: L-A-R?

**Jessie** : L-a-r-k-i-n - R-e-y-n-o-l-d-s.

**Walters**: Larkin Reynolds. The name does sound familiar. Let's run him through the computer and see what we come up with.

**Jessie** : Fine with me. I'm sure not going anywhere.

**Walters**: (Hands the information to the matron. She leaves) Now let's get started shall we?

**Jessie** : Larkin Reynolds was my father's boss. He discovered that Reynold's business was a front for a mob passed out.. I wish I'd died instead. If I had been able to scream, then maybe, just maybe ....

**Walters**: Jessie, I'd like for you to reconsider getting a lawyer. You really could use one.

**Jessie** : Whatever. It doesn't matter anymore. Nothing does.  
(Walters speaks to the matron; she leaves)

**Jessie** : You must think me a terribly cold person. Everyone who knows me would tell you I'm not capable of killing. Then again, everyone who matters is gone now.

**Walters**: If you want my personal opinion, I can't say I wouldn't have done the same thing. I don't know. But then again, what I think doesn't make a difference.

**Jessie** : More than what you think.

(Shayla Davis and the matron enter. Shayla is holding a folder similar to the one Detective Walters is looking at.)

**Walters**: Jessie, I'd like for you to meet a friend of mine. This is Shayla Davis. She's the lawyer I mentioned a while ago.

**Shayla** : Hello, Jessie.

**Jessie** : (Nods.)

**Shayla** : I've only had time to scan your transcript, but I think I can help you.

**Jessie** : Why would you want to help a person you know is guilty?

**Shayla** : Because, Jessie, even though I think what you did was wrong, from what I've read, I don't feel society would gain from your punishment.

**Jessie** : I don't understand.

**Shayla** : Jessie, the penalty for pre-meditated murder in this state is death by lethal injection. We have a very high crime rate here. The courts take murder seriously and rarely make exceptions.

**Jessie** : All right. I murdered some creep and I'm a lost cause. So why are you wasting time on me?



official, such as Detective Walters, feels he has a case that is an exception, they consult me.

**Jessie** : In other words, if I have a chance, it's you.

**Shayla** : I think we're beginning to understand each other.

**Walters**: The computer kicked out a rap sheet on your Mr. Reynolds long enough for a mini-series. He was definitely bad news.

**Shayla** : Jessie, I realize you've been through a lot, but if I'm going to help you I need to know everything. What happened after the explosion?

**Jessie** : There's not much more to tell. I lay in a hospital bed for three weeks with a mild concussion and burns. I had nothing to do but remember. The police only listened to my story. They never followed up on any of the information I gave them. I went to officials over their heads and all I'd get is one door after another shut in my face. They were bought and paid for by Larkin Reynolds. I knew that if he were going to pay for what he did to my family, I would have to make him pay because the police sure weren't going to. Finally, I left the hospital and went looking for Reynolds. It didn't take long to figure out he'd come here. You see, he had several night clubs in various large cities across the country he was using for big time drug operations. Here he owned the Club Vanity.

**Walters**: I'm familiar with the place. The federal guys have had it under investigation for the last six months.

**Jessie** : I cut and dyed my hair. When he entered the club last night, I did everything I could to seduce him. It wasn't very difficult. There was one thing in this world he liked a lot more than money and drugs. Anyway, after I got his attention, it didn't take much to convince him to take me home.

**Walters**: This whole time he didn't guess who you were?

**Jessie** : He kept saying there was something about my eyes that bothered him. I just told him they were bedroom eyes. That amused him.

**Shayla** : Jessie, I need to know what was going on in your mind all this time.

**Jessie** : Hate, disgust, vengeance and fear. Vengeance for the innocent lives he took that belonged to me. Disgust at the role I was having to play to gain his confidence. hate for the evil he had done to the most precious part of my life. And fear for the other mothers and their children he would prey on had I not taken from him what he had taken from me.

**Shavla** : This is very important, Jessie, so think hard before you

answer. Why did you kill Larkin Reynolds the way you did?

**Jessie** : The way that I did! I didn't hear anyone asking him why he even killed my kids much less why he did it the way he did!

**Shayla** : If I'm going to help you, I have to be able to justify your actions to the court. In order to do that effectively, I have to understand the motivation behind your method.

**Jessie** : Detective Walters, earlier you mentioned the children's names. I named them after family members. I'm the type of person that if I love you, I love you with all I've got in me. I had a lot of time to think while I lay in the hospital. Unfortunately, what I thought about most was, what did my kids feel when they died? Did they feel any pain or was it sudden enough that they were spared any? Something inside of me, inside my head, kept seeing visions of them in the fire. They were screaming in pain and reaching through the heat and flames towards me, crying for their Mamma to help them! These images stayed in my head whether I was awake or asleep, it didn't make any difference. It kept eating away at me until all I could think of was making Larkin Reynolds feel the same pain he had inflicted on my children!

**Shayla** : Were those the thoughts in your head when you actually killed him?

**Jessie** : Yes. I lured him to the bedroom. I tried hard not to think about sleeping with him. It disgusted me and made me hate him more. I took the knife from under the pillow and drove it as deeply as I possibly could into his gut. Then I gave it a turn and said this is for my son. Then I turned it again and said this is for my daughter. I just kept stabbing and turning the knife until I felt he had suffered as much as they had. Miss Davis, if you're trying to get me to say I'm sorry for what I did to him, we're wasting each others time. I wasn't sorry when I killed him and I'm still not sorry. I just regret I didn't kill all the Larkin Reynold's of the world.

**Shayla** : I'm going to do everything I can to help you, Jessie. As far as I'm concerned you did society a favor.

**Walters**: Jessie, we'd like for you to plead not guilty by reason of insanity.

**Shayla** : I think that would be best, Jessie. Even though I don't believe that you are crazy, I think at the moment you killed him, you were insane with grief.

**Jessie** : All right. If that's what you think is best.

**Shayla** : (Standing to leave; shakes their hands) That's settled then. I'll see you both in court.

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**SCENE II**

**Setting:** Interior of a courtroom to hear closing arguments by the lawyers.

**Prosecutor:** Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, we are here today for one purpose and one purpose only. We must decide "if" the defendant, Jessie Powell, is guilty of murdering one Larkin Reynolds. Now, notice that I didn't say we were to determine whether or not the murder was justified or not. Murder is not, cannot, be justified. We have a very fine, elaborate judicial system which people who have had crimes committed against them can depend on. Then there is our own sense of right and wrong that as a nation we have come to believe in. No, ladies and gentlemen, there is no justification for murder.

Did she do it or did she not do it? Not "why" she did it but "did" she do it? You have heard the testimony, reluctant as it was, of Detective Walters. You have even heard the defendant herself testify that she killed him. She killed him, that's a fact. Now, the defense would like us to believe that Jessie was insane with grief and sorrow when she murdered Larkin Reynolds. I ask you, intelligent members of this jury, does a person who is insane plan what they're going to do? Of course not. They act in an uncontrollable moment of passion. Is this what Jessie Powell did? No she did not. She came to this city with the sole purpose of murdering him. She put the murder weapon under the pillow before she left her room. She seduced him for the very purpose of getting him back to her room so she could murder him. That's pre-meditated murder, is it not? She thought about what she was going to do, she decided that she would do it and then she did it! I don't see what other evidence one could possibly need to find the defendant, Jessie Powell, guilty of first - degree murder. Thank - you.

**Shayla :** Ladies and gentlemen, our esteemed prosecutor has asked you to put aside your emotions, your compassion, and look at the facts. Let's do that for a moment, shall we. Fact: Larkin Reynolds was a major drug dealer. Fact: In his eight years or so as a leading mob figure, he was never convicted of any of the horrendous crimes which he'd been a part of. As a matter of fact he never even spent longer than one night in jail. If Larkin Reynolds had been in jail where he was supposed to have been to begin with, he wouldn't have been able to kill Jessie's family and



she'd still be holding her children in her arms instead of being here on trial for her life. Fact: Larkin Reynolds brutally murdered Jessie's parents, her brother and even her babies; right there in front of her eyes. She was an eye-witness. She watched as Larkin Reynolds took the most precious treasure she had. She told the officials everything she knew, specifically naming Larkin Reynolds as the cold blooded murderer of her family.

Now, you are a police officer assigned to this case. You have the gruesome murder of four people, two of them little children. You have a suspect and an eye-witness who can testify not only to the fact that the suspect was there, but she actually saw him throw one of the grenades that killed her family. Now, from a legal standpoint, I'd say you have a fairly airtight case against this man. The system not only failed Jessie, it failed all of us.

The prosecution has stressed the fact that murder is not, cannot be justified. By allowing Larkin Reynolds to go free, didn't the system justify what he did? We don't deny that Jessie killed Larkin Reynolds. We just ask for compassion, based on the facts, and ask you to reach a verdict of not guilty by reason of insanity. Insanity cannot be confined to a mere moment when it comes to the death of your children. Put yourself in Jessie's place. Would you have done any less had it been your children? Would you ever again be truly sane? I think not, ladies and gentlemen. Thank-you.

### SCENE III

**Setting:** A jail cell on Death Row

**Walters:** I'm sorry, Jessie. You know we don't agree with the courts decision. You were brave to go up against a creep like Reynolds. I wish half my men had as much guts.

**Jessie :** You did your best. I'm very thankful to you for that. And to you, Miss Davis; I do appreciate what you did for me.

**Shayla :** I'm sorry things didn't work out differently.

**Jessie :** Well, you both tried, and that's more than most would have done.

**Walters:** It still feels like there should be something we could do.

**Jessie :** Maybe there is.

**Walters:** Just name it.

**Jessie :** Help toughen the drug laws where they protect the innocent and not the criminal. Then bust every creep like Reynolds you can, and when the courts hand down that guilty verdict say, "that's for Jessie!"

THE END



SCENE I: The Merble's Kitchen

SCENE II: The Merble's Living Room And Kitchen

THE CHARACTERS: Conlee Merbles (the father: age 64)

A hearty, former well figured man, now with a pot belly and aged hands; he has seen his better days. Work natured, serious minded, descent natured person, yet he overlooks the obvious. Nickname: Nighttrain.

Joan Ann Merbles (the mother : age 53)

A delicate, aging woman, who can't escape her fate due to her own will. Her intentions are good. Nickname: Mappy.

Ray Merbles (eldest son: age 24)

A bear imaged, soft-hearted jovial young man who is just "there." Nickname: Plo.

Martin Merbles (middle son: age 22)

A close replica of his father, but he usually considers both sides of a conflict. Nickname: P.A.

Grant Merbles (youngest son: age 19)

A close replica of his mother, and direct opposite of his father. Nickname: Mix.

\*\*\*\*\* SCENE I \*\*\*\*\*

The Merbles' kitchen, a plain, common kitchen for a commune family, respectively. The type of kitchen society must endure, or else falter without; equipped with a sink, dishwasher, fridge, appliances, and a plain table with spices, sugar, salt and pepper. Only the left portion of the house (the kitchen) is emanate in bright light.

\*\*\*\*\*

(Curtain rises. It's 7:30, Saturday morning, in winter. Joan is in a flannel robe, flipping French toast on a griddle, which sets on the counter nearest the living room. Grant awkwardly walks in the kitchen through the swinging living room door as though someone forced him out of bed; he is wearing long johns under a pair of white shorts and tee-shirt.)

**JOAN** Well, good morning, Mix! How are you?

**GRANT** (Stretches and yawns)

Mornin', Mappy. I'm o.k., but for some blessed reason, once again, I can't sleep in.

**JOAN** What's wrong? Why can't you sleep in, son?

**GRANT** Who do you think why?

**JOAN** (Turns off the griddle) What... oh, you mean, why do I think?

**GRANT** (Walks over to the counter and touches a piece of toast) No! I mean who, who do you think gets me up early every morning? You guessed it... Dad!

**JOAN** (Removes the toast and places it on a dish)

How did he get you up? He's been toying in the garage all morning... (Touches her chin with index finger) he may have run through here, but I didn't see—

**GRANT** No, Mappy, it's him... his presence... it's sort of like... (Looks up) you know, like when we were young, and we'd get up on Saturday mornin' and flip on the cartoons— and then— stomp, stomp, he'd be coming. So out of the house we'd go and a chore we'd find, whether it was raking leaves or acting like it. (Pauses) There's no resting in this house, not with Nighttrain roaming around, and gosh, ever since he retired... there's just no peace. I just can't relax, it's stay busy or else.

**JOAN** (grabs juice out of the fridge and cups out of cabinet)

Grant, that's just the way he is. He's from an entirely different generation than you. He sees things totally different. Don't think you're the only one, he was like that with his other kids before he married me. Mike and Terri always said—

**GRANT** I know, I've heard it an **indefinite** number of times... Anyway what I was saying about never being able to sit down or relax. Well, it all ties in with not being able to sleep in.

**JOAN** (Begins pouring juice) How do you mean?

**GRANT** Well, it's all the same thing. Think back again, not only did he keep us busy doing some made up chore, but he'd also get us up at 6:30 every Saturday morning. Remember, he'd say, "Hey, get outa bed, you're burning daylight, when I was young..." and so on and so on.

**JOAN** (Puts the juice carton back in fridge)

How could I forget? He'd tell me the same thing.

**GRANT** I know, don't forget my room is across the hall from yours, I hear it all. (Thinks to himself) What am I saying, he still does it. (In a serious mocking voice) "Joan, Joan, Joan... are you awake?"

**JOAN** Oh that kills me. Saturday is the only day I can sleep in.

**GRANT** What I'm saying is this; regardless if he physically wakes me, I still wake up. It's like I'm trained or something... yeah—that's it. He has trained me like a drill sergeant, and I'm his private. I'm not in the army ya'know. (Pauses) It's like a disease, I wake up, eyes wide open, fists clenched, teeth biting... just knowing he's thinking to himself, **somewhere**, or talking under his breath, saying, "Why are those kids in bed while I'm laboring my life away." For goodness sakes, Mom, God gave us rest... (As if he has made a discovery) God even rested himself!

(Ray enters from living room)

**JOAN** Good morning, Ray, how are you feeling this morning?

**RAY** How in the hell would you be—

**JOAN** Ray! Watch your mouth.

**RAY** (Looks around wildly) Oh no! Where's it going?

(Ray sits down in chair nearest garage entrance)

**JOAN** (Shakes her fist at him in a joking manner) I'll tell you where it's going, right here in front of my fist when I belt you a good one.

**RAY** Oh yeah, like that time Dad belted you—

**JOAN** RAY! If you—

**RAY** Mom, I was just kidding.

**JOAN** Joke or no joke, you keep that to yourself; this family doesn't dig up old skeletons. Like I always say, you can't cry over spilled milk. (Begins looking for the syrup)

**GRANT** (Shakes his finger at her) Shame shame, Mappy, the devil's going to get you for being a hypocrite. (Rises to get plates and silverware)

**JOAN** What are you talking about?

**GRANT** About being a hypocrite; what we learn in church?

**JOAN** I'm not a hypocrite.

**GRANT** Is that right; well what about that DUI I got two years ago?

**JOAN** What about it?

**GRANT** What about it? That's all I hear about when I ask to stay out late. Everytime—

**JOAN** That's your father's doings; he just has his ways. I tell him he needs to forget about it. Like I always say, bygones should be bygones.

**GRANT** You're darn tootin'; but he still doesn't trust me to this day. Even though I haven't had a sip to this day.

(Joan looks for the syrup in a different cabinet)

**RAY** Bygones! How come all I ever hear about anymore is the damn money, it's always the money. It wasn't my fault I couldn't find Dad's keys to lock up his precious truck; and besides, how was I to know he left his hunting club fees in it. He should have deposited them instead of leaving them in his truck.

(Grant begins setting the table.)

**JOAN** (Laughing) I guess you shouldn't have borrowed his truck, you know if you would have asked him, he wouldn't have—

**RAY** What was I supposed to do? If I'd worked on Uncle George's pit crew, maybe I could've changed the tire and made it to work on time. But how could I have done anything different? Should I have walked?



**JOAN** No, Ray, He—

**RAY** Maybe he'll be satisfied if I pay him back... **with interest.**

(Martins enters the living room.)

**JOAN** I doubt it, he'll probably remind you of it till the day one of you dies. And the way it looks, we'll all die of tension. (She stares absent minded; Martin sits down right of Ray.)

**GRANT** Tension? I'll kill myself first (Raises his finger to his head in a gun motion), Boom! (Martin jerks back in his seat unnoticed.)

**JOAN** (Dazed) Have any of you seen the syrup?

**MARTIN** (Very somber) It's on the table, Mom.

**JOAN** (Throws her hands in the air) Omigosh, I'm losing it.

**RAY** Mappy, you've already lost it.

**JOAN** (Searches for a name)

Mar-Gra-Ray! If you don't watch it, I'll hit you over the head with my spatula, and then you can see if you can find your eyeballs... Good morning, Martin.

**MARTIN** (Somber) Yeah, if you say so.

**JOAN** (Brings food over) (To Martin) What's wrong with you? Don't you feel good? (She pats him on the shoulder and goes back for the juice.)

**MARTIN** (Takes a deep breath) I feel fine.

**JOAN** Are you sure?

**MARTIN** Yes.

**JOAN** Ray, what did you and Chris do at Ruby's bar and grill; did you guys dance? (Passes out two juices and goes back for other two)

**RAY** Not with each other. (Laughs)

**GRANT** Make a bet?

**JOAN** You know what I mean.

**GRANT** No, Mom, all they did was shoot pool and **talk** about this chick and that chick. (Laughs)

(Joan returns with remaining two juices and sits down in chair nearest living room.)

**RAY** That's better than what you and Beth do; (mocking Grant) "Hey, baby, let's go write some poetry." (mocking a girl's voice) "Oh that sounds so romantic." Then ya'll hop in your doodle bug and off you go... as far as you can make it, before you run out of gas.

**GRANT** It's in your best interest to keep Beth and my poetry out of this.

**JOAN** Boys, both of you be quiet, I've already heard a week's worth from your father... and I'll tell you what I tell him; there will be no arguing in this house. And also, you guys—

**GRANT** Here we go again, same old song.

**JOAN** What do you want me to do, bottle up my anger the same way your father bottles up his feelings; well I refuse.

**RAY** No, Mom, we just get tired of the same old boring story. We'd listen if you came up with a different complaint.

**JOAN** I just—

**GRANT** Spare us, Mom, we already know: he went hunting, he missed a deer, he missed dinner, he stumbled home — you worried your brains out, you think he's killing himself, you—

(Martin puts his head in his hands.)

**JOAN** I just can't take anymore. I don't want to—

**RAY** You're beginning to sound like a soap opera. If I had a dollar for—

**GRANT** (Loud and clear) Divorce the man! No one's stopping you. If I could divorce him, I would. (Short pause) Look, just cool it until you come up with a different story. At least our stories change from time to time.

(Short pause)

**JOAN** Would someone say— (A loud, hoarse noise sounds off in the garage, like something being slid across the cement. Everyone jumps (in their seats) except Martin, who only remove his head from his hands.)

**RAY** My gosh, what— (Noise is repeated)

**GRANT** Why doesn't he cut that out? (Again the same noise, but louder and longer) We're trying to say a blessing in here! (Aims voice towards garage)

**MARTIN** Mom, did you tell Dad it was time to eat.

**JOAN** (Startled) Uh... no, I sure didn't.

(Joan rises and slowly approaches the door.)

**MARTIN** You know he needs to eat on time, his blood/sugar level has been acting up lately. The last time I called home, he sounded concerned about it.

**GRANT** Let it act up, It's only fair. My nerves act up, his nerves act up (Points at Ray), her nerves act up (points to Joan).

**RAY** That's right, he gives me more shakes than Noriega would have in a cell next to James Brown. (Ray and Grant laugh.)

**JOAN** (Hollering slightly out the kitchen door)

Lee! Breakfast is on the table!

**GRANT** That was a good one Plo, did you actually make it up yourself?

(off.) LEE

Be there in a couple!

**RAY** Yeah... (Fools no one) No. Jay Leno did... (Picks at the French toast) Mappy, this looks more like French roast to me. (Laughs)

**JOAN** (Sits back down) Like I always say, if you don't like it, lump it, take it to the city hall and dump it. (Smiles at her own humor)

(Ray and Grant fake laugh)

**GRANT** (Holds his heart) Oh, Mappy, you're humor justs kills me. (Instantly Martin jerks very noticeably.)

**RAY** Calm down P.A., the food won't kill you; Dad eventually may (laughs), but not the food.

**MARTIN** Dammit! (Rises quickly and hits the table, everyone shifts (in their chairs)) Everytime I come home from school, every single cursin' time, all I hear is "Dad this! Dad that!" Don't you people see what you're doing? Don't—

**GRANT** Don't you see what we go through? You don't live here

anymore. Especially since he retired, it's unbearable. Hell, it's like there's a constant supervisor from the twenty-first century floating around, always asking questions— "Where have you been, what are you doing, why—

**MARTIN** It doesn't bother me when I'm home.

**GRANT** You just don't get it do you? YOU DON'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE, you don't see—

**MARTIN** Well, it didn't bother me then either, did it? No! I got along with him fine.

**GRANT** And so did we... **then!** (Calmer) Look, you are missing my point; YOU ARE NOT HERE ANYMORE, HE HAS RETIRED (Almost spelling it out).

**MARTIN** It shouldn't matter, I would still get along with him.

**RAY** (Barges into conversation) 'Cause you're just like the man, that's why. You two hunt together, fish together, work on—

**MARTIN** What does it matter, he's still your father.

(Ray forks a couple of pieces of French toast onto his plate and begins eating)

**JOAN** Boys, I said there will be no arguing—

**MARTIN** The man raised you didn't he? He gave you a house to live in, fed you, clothed you, gave you a bed to sleep in.

**GRANT** (Jumps up and yells) Of course he did, but aren't all fathers **supposed** to; it's required for God's sake. But what about all the love, affection— all that comes from Mom. What did he do when I won my scholarship, hu? (Throws hands up) He said, "Good, but all the time you spent kissing butt, you could've been working." (Sarcastic) My gosh, how nice could he be.

**MARTIN** Grant, he's just set in his ways; he's not open to new ideas. That's simply the way he is, and that's how he was brought up... it's the only way he knows.

**GRANT** That doesn't mean it's the **right** way. There isn't just **one** way to raise children.

**MARTIN** Grant, you have to understand, he's from the old school. Did he ever tell you about his growing up?

**GRANT** Does he ever tell any one that sort of stuff besides you?

**MARTIN** When he was young, he worked at a garage. He worked



on cars and pumped gas; he did it at the age of **twelve**.

**GRANT** (Sardonically) Yeah, I know, and walked ten blocks, through the snow, **barefoot**, uuuphill.

**MARTIN** Would you shut up and listen, for once, instead of running your damn mouth and intensifying the situation. (Grant turns away.) He was a darn good mechanic too, from what Grandma says, almost as good as Uncle George. But, as good a mechanic he was, Grandpa **never** let him work on his or Grandma's car... it was always Uncle George instead.

**GRANT** Is there any light at the end of this sob story, or are you just wasting my time?

**MARTIN** The point is this: Dad **has** raised us differently from the way Grandpa raised him. It's just hard to see the differences sometimes.

**GRANT** Well, it still isn't the right way.

**RAY** I've heard more than my share of arguing this morning.

(Ray gets up and exits through the living room door leaving his breakfast half-eaten, on the table)

**MARTIN** He lets you work on his car doesn't he? He lets you wash it—

**GRANT** Oohh, what an honor, I'm his royal slave (Sits up straight, army like).

(A clinking noise is heard in the garage)

**JOAN** All right you two, I've heard enough. Your dad is your dad whether you like it or not.

**MARTIN** Whether we like it or not? You all better start liking him for who he is; you can joke all you want, but the man's health isn't getting any better. He tries to ignore it, but—

**JOAN** (Stern) We don't have to talk about this anymore I said.

**MARTIN** The heck we don't! You all talk about him like he was a cruel dictator or something— well he's not, he's the head of this household, and will be until the day he dies... One of these days you will regret everything you've ever said about him. Trust me. ♪  
The man doesn't—

**JOAN** Enough already!

(A pause)

**MARTIN** (Milder tone) You just never know when someone you love will die... (Pause) it happens too quickly. They're there and then they're gone. It happens. It happened to me... last week. Jason... Jason... (Joan and Grant turn towards him in awe) It's just not fair... (Voice begins cracking) I thought I knew him well, but I didn't. No-one tells you when, you have no idea. I, I, I didn't tell him... I only wish that I had time... it was just too fast... he was my friend, only two doors down... two doors down (He rises abruptly and hurriedly exits through the living room in tears)

(A long pause, Joan and Grant stare blankly. Lee enters from garage door; he's a bit greasy and heads to the sink.)

**LEE** Mornin' guys, where's the rest of the troops?

(Joan points to the bedroom. A door slams)

**GRANT** (Half-whisper) My God, that's why he's been acting strange.

(Lee goes to the speaker phone and pushes a button which automatically dials the time/temp.)

**JOAN** (To Grant) I wonder who it was?

**LEE** Hush! I'm trying to hear the temperature.

(The phone buzzes, Time: 7:46 a.m., Temperature: 32 degrees. Lee takes his place at the table in the chair nearest the garage door)

**LEE** Gettin' cold out there, what did I tell you? (Pokes at the ranch toast.) Joan, why'd you let it get cold?

**JOAN** (Reaches for a hand) Can we say grace?

---

(Lights fade, curtain falls. Audience claps till next scene.)

\*\*\*\*\* SCENE II \*\*\*\*\*

The Merbles' living room, lit mildly; the kitchen is dimmed out. Peace and quiet unseemingly has descended, a near extinct occurrence in the Merble home.

\*\*\*\*\*

(It's 6:15, Saturday evening; Joan and Grant sit in the living room entranced in books. Grant sits in the chair nearest the audience, and Joan sits nearest the kitchen.)

(A pause)

**JOAN** Aren't you and Beth going out tonight?

**GRANT** She's got a ballgame tonight.

**JOAN** What's wrong with going to it and watch her cheer?

**GRANT** That gets kind of old after a while; anyway, I don't think I could treat her very nice right now.

**JOAN** Why not? Did you two get into a fight?

**GRANT** No. I'm just not in the greatest spirits right now.

**JOAN** What's wrong?

**GRANT** I don't feel like talking about it.

(A ten second pause)

**GRANT** Billy Pilgrim is definitely a unique person.

**JOAN** What did you say about a silly pilgrim?

**GRANT** Billy! Billy Pilgrim. He is the main character in this book I'm reading. He's strange, but the irony is that he is a cool guy because he's such a nerd.

**JOAN** (Aside to audience) I won't even ask what he meant by that?

**GRANT** This is one book I want to finish.

**JOAN** What's the name of it?

**GRANT** Slaughterhouse Five.

**JOAN** Slaughterhouse what? It sounds like a grotesque movie I saw back—

(A truck muffler rattles outside. Both Joan and Grant are silent with open ears.)

**JOAN** Must be your father.

**GRANT** (Mumbles) Same old sound, same old thing... same old tradition.

**JOAN** What are you mumbling about?

**GRANT** Nothing... just... him, Mr. give a damn.

**JOAN** Hey, that's no way to talk.

**GRANT** You watch, he'll walk in, put his keys down, dial the temperature, walk in and say, "Hi! How are you guts doing?" And then he'll say, "Boy, it's getting cold," or something like that. Then old faithful will go to the bube tube and worship it.

**JOAN** Like I always say... (Actions in the living room cease, as the kitchen door opens. Lee enters, takes off boots, turns on light, sets keys down, goes to phone and pushes a button which automatically dials time/temperature. The recording buzzed that it is 6:21 p.m., 24 degrees. Grant shakes head up and down, smiles with pleasure.)

**LEE** Gosh! (He reads over a piece of paper sitting near the phone.)

**GRANT** What were you asking... oh yeah, well I don't know why it's called Slaughterhouse Five, I haven't read that far yet.

(Pauses) I like the way this guy writes... daring and trying. I like that in a writer. That's the way I like to write poetry. I like to try new things, travel the unexplored with an adolescent sense of adventure. If I— (Lee enters living room and interrupts.)

**LEE** Gettin cold out there. (Goes towards woodheater)

**JOAN** Hi, Lee.

**GRANT** (Mumbles) Hey.

(Lee opens woodheater door slightly thinking initial heat will rush out.)



**JOAN** Did you kill anything?

(Lee opens the woodheater door and peeks in.)

**LEE** No, just a lot of time.

(Lee begins poking inside woodheater with fire poker.)

**GRANT** (To audience, pointing thumb at woodheater) Forgot about the traditional woodheater.

(Lee wads up some old newspapers and throws them in woodheater.)

**JOAN** (To Lee) What are you doing?

**LEE** What does it look like? I'm doing what you two didn't; I'm building a fire. (Throws a couple of small sticks in the fire)

**JOAN** Ohh, I didn't notice that it was cold.

**GRANT** It wasn't... until he walked in.

**LEE** (Stern) What did you say?

**GRANT** I said, "It wasn't until you walked in."

**LEE** Meaning what?

**GRANT** Meaning it wasn't cold until you opened the door and let all the cold air in.

(Lee jerks his head back towards the woodheater. During a short pause, he tries to light a small piece of lighter wood, but is unsuccessful. He rises defeated, turns on t.v., and walks towards remaining chair.)

**GRANT** Can't we sit here just **one** night without that heap of trash dictating 'us?

**LEE** What's wrong with watching t.v.?

**GRANT** You watch that trash every night. Just once we'd like to sit here in peace and read.

**LEE** Go to your room and read, the t.v. won't bother you up there.

**GRANT** I read in my room every single night.

**LEE** (Flips through the stations) What's wrong with that?

**GRANT** You tell me.

**LEE** How should I know, you're the one bitchin'—

**GRANT** With good reason, too.

**LEE** Well let's hear it.

**GRANT** Every night you watch the t.v. You turn it up so loud I have to go to my room and wear earplugs.

**LEE** You're exaggerating.

**GRANT** No I'm not.

**LEE** What?

**GRANT** (Loud and clear) I said I'm not exaggerating. And you wonder why I stay in my room.

**LEE** What are you talking about?

**GRANT** You know what I'm talking about. The other night when I was coming down the stairs, I heard you. You asked Mom why I always stay in my room at night, and then you answered your own question by saying it was because I didn't want to be in here with you. If you weren't so possessed with that damn Satan box, I'd stay in the living room more often.

**LEE** Ohhh... o.k.... now we're getting somewhere. Now the shit's gonna hit the fan. I don't want to hear this t.v. business, it ain't just the t.v.. You've been avoiding my presence for three weeks now.

**GRANT** Can you blame me?

**LEE** What?

**GRANT** Can you blame me? The only time we have discussions is when you're yelling at me or blaming me for something.

**LEE** That's not true.

**GRANT** Yes it is. Think about it. All we do is argue.

**LEE** We have a good time when we go hunting.

**GRANT** I don't want to hear about hunting.

**LEE** What did you say?

**GRANT** I said I don't want to hear about hunting. I'm never hunting again!

(Lee sits up straight and opens eyes wide.)

**JOAN** You two cool it.

**LEE** Shut up, Joan! (To Grant) What do you mean you're not

hunting anymore? I thought you enjoyed it.

**GRANT** No, Dad, No! I never enjoyed it. Don't you see, I only went hunting with you, because you wanted me to.

**LEE** Well what's wrong with doing things I'm interested in!

(Martin enters from stairway, then turns and goes back.)

**JOAN** Can't you two—

**LEE** I said be quiet!

**JOAN** There will be no arguing in this house; I can't listen to anymore.

**LEE** Then leave!

(Joan rises abruptly and exits through stairway.)

**GRANT** Dad, there's nothing wrong with me doing things you like, not a damn thing... *if*, you ever cared to do one single thing I'm interested in... or *if*, you ever gave a lick about the things I'm interested in. When was the last time you asked me if there was something I wanted to do; or when have you ever asked about me, and how I was *really* doing; instead of the old customary "How are you?" When have you ever, *ever* asked about my poetry?

**LEE** Grant, you know I don't understand that stuff.

**GRANT** What does it matter whether you can understand. Hell, you can fake it. For God's sake, I've faked "happy hunting" for two years, until now! Hell, I couldn't even shoot a deer if it walked right out in front of me.

**LEE** Some kind of man you are.

**GRANT** Ohh, is that what it makes me, a man— Hah! I'd better go get my rattle, cause I let a dandy ten point go the—

**LEE** YOU, LET, A, TEN, POINT, GO, BY!

**GRANT** Yyepp.

**LEE** Are you crazy?

**GRANT** Talk about crazy, you should've heard the conversation we had (Laughs).

**LEE** You oughta be shot.

**GRANT** Yeah, go ahead, shoot me. You never could hurt anything without your man-made killers.

**LEE** We'll just have to see about that one day now—

**GRANT** Nope, cause as soon as I can, I'm out the door.

**LEE** Leaving? You couldn't if you tried.

**GRANT** The hell I can't, I've already talked to Mike.

**LEE** Mike? Mike! Your incompetent half brother who can't stay out of debt, much less hold a real job.

**GRANT** At least not one of your jobs. He can make money without getting dirty. And he can also do more than you ever knew was possible.

**LEE** Like what?

**GRANT** Plenty. Whenever I call Mike with a problem, he listens; when I tell him I love him, he says it back. When—

**LEE** I tell you I love you!

**GRANT** But you don't mean it, you never have. You've resented me since birth!

**LEE** That's not true!

**GRANT** How come Mom said I was an accident?

**LEE** She wasn't supposed—

**GRANT** What does it matter? No one had to tell... a forty-five year old man having a child. I should call you Grandpa.

**LEE** You watch your mouth, or you won't have one to talk with! I may be old—

**GRANT** Why? Ain't I old enough to use abusive adult comments?

**LEE** I told you to—

**GRANT** I heard what you said.

**LEE** This old man may not look like much, but looks are deceiving.

**GRANT** You think so, well why don't we see if you're right.

(Grant rises, then Lee, both in fighting manner. Joan comes to the end of the stairs.)

**JOAN** You two—

**LEE** Stay out of this Joan.

(Joan runs up the stairs hollering.)

(off.)**JOAN** Martin! Martin!

**GRANT** It's about time we got around to this.

(Joan comes running in with Martin by the arm.)

**JOAN** Martin, stop them! Do something Martin!



**MARTIN** Would you two stop acting like children? You're grown up— now act like it.

**LEE** Martin, go back to your room!

**GRANT** Sorry Martin, I've been waiting too long for this!

(They draw closer, Martin steps between them.)

**MARTIN** Then the two of you will have to hit through me.

(Grant steps back.)

**LEE** Go to your damn room, Martin!

**GRANT** That's all right, we'll go outside.

(Grant waves his hand like he's pitching a softball, and points towards the kitchen door.)

**LEE** That's fine with me.

(Lee enters kitchen, flips light on angrily. Grant follows and shuts middle door behind him; living room dims. Joan and Martin just stand there. Lee exits through kitchen door and leaves it open. Grant, parading behind, stops by exit, and then turns to audience; then shuts the exit and locks it. Grant comes center of kitchen. All lights are dim, except for spotlight on Grant.)

(to audience) **GRANT** We fooled you didn't we? Well don't feel dumb, you're not the first misled audience. I know, I know— why didn't I follow him out the door, and why didn't we fight it out?

Well, even if I would've, you guys wouldn't have seen it; we would've fought outside, behind the curtain (He points to big closed curtain hanging between kitchen wall and auditorium wall.) All you guys would've heard was a bunch of bangs and screams, maybe, and that wouldn't have been any fun at all. Besides, you can just turn on the t.v. for abusive pleasure.

The reason I closed the door is simple; the door is the rest

of my life. I'm up to here (raises hand to head) with him, and vice versa, so the best thing we can do is close the door between us. I know it sounds like I'm giving up, but after nineteen years of a cemented-in-his-ways father; I can only see one light at the end of this tunnel. I figure it's for the best. Heck, it's better than continuous conflict, isn't it.

Look at it this way; he and I are, and will always be, two totally different people. We're from two totally different worlds, generations. There's no way around it. So why should we fake it. That would only make matters worse.

Well, if you're wondering what became of Martin's grief, you're not doing yourself any good. 'Cause for people like Martin, pain never leaves; it just piles on top of itself, until it all builds up. Then he'll die. It's always been this way, they just can't take much; so usually they die very young; like Martin's friend who shot himself.

Others can take as much as they are served; like Dad. Their hearts are kind of like... ohh... garbage disposals. When they add too much pain, their heart sort of dissolves some of the weight.

As for Mom, she stayed with Dad till he finally died. I can't understand, and probably will never, why so many sweet women, like her, stay with their selfish, rude husbands. She was unfortunately reared with a mother and father of the same sort; and she just happened to follow suit.

And Ray, he simply went on being Ray. He continued working at some old factory job. The world fortunately can't go on without people like Ray.

I apologize deeply for the bad choice of words in the play; but this is a drama, and it's real. Everywhere this sort of conflict occurs, sometimes like this, sometimes not. And wherever there's drama, there has to be tension. And with tension comes anger, and anger is the devil himself.

Well, I'll have to say goodnight now, my times about up.

(He begins walking offstage, bottom right, then comes back.)

Oh yeah, as for me and Dad, he went his way and I went

mine. To close and conclude I'll quote a line from a Kurt Vonnegut book, Slaughterhouse Five, "And so it goes..."

(Light diminishes, curtain falls. Audience claps for hours.)

THE END

